



THE AUTHOR

# RUSSIA IN CHAINS

*A Record of Unspeakable Suffering*

*by*

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*Translated by*

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## FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

To good, old, and, in spite of the crisis, still cheerful, Britain (I have never met with a more cheerful people than the British), the events of the Russian Revolution are as remote as the Yang-tse Kiang floods. Yes, an elemental disaster. Yes, millions of perished. A great pity. But—it is all so remote.

And yet the Bolshevik Revolution is closer home: not only geographically, but politically. Good, old, cheerful Britain has had occasion to swallow many a surprise from the Bolsheviks, and she has yet to swallow more. And though the Soviet régime provides many themes for the humorists of the world, it leaves but little room for humour; all is drenched in blood.

This book was written two years ago and concerns Soviet life as it was up to the middle of 1934. A strange fate has befallen the book; instead of growing out of date it has so to speak undergone a process of rejuvenation. In 1935 not only foreigners, but Russian emigrants, accused the author of libelling Soviet Russia. In 1937 the events described in the book were generally recognised among foreigners, as among Russian emigrants, for what they were—factual statements.

The franknesses of André Gide and Sir Walter Citrine, the fall in Soviet industrial and agricultural production, mass executions and eve-of-the-poll terror, opened the eyes of the civilised world to the very facts it was so reluctant to take note of before. The present volume explains those facts. In order to come by this explanation I was obliged to spend fifteen years in first-hand study of Soviet life and several months in the highest school—the Concentration Camp.

It is customary to suppose that the chief victims of the October Revolution were the Dukes and Counts, the landowners and industrialists, the capitalists and the middle class. And that it is precisely they who inspire and



lead the anti-Soviet movement. As regards losses, it is not easy to judge whose loss was the greater, the aristocrat's, who lost £10,000,000 and managed to salvage £10,000 for export, or the peasant's, who had a pound of bread and lost it. On £10,000 one may contrive to live without privation. Without bread—one turns cannibal.

It is precisely the working classes which suffered first and worst from the October Revolution. And it is this fact which is an earnest of the fall of Communism.

In my anti-Soviet activities—and this is undoubtedly my present occupation—I do not make it my aim to agitate for a return to me of lands, factories, capitals, titles or ranks, for the simple reason that these I never possessed. My father was the son of a peasant; in early youth he was a village swineherd. By his own efforts, for his family was burnt out of house and home, he contrived to earn his teaching degree at the Teachers' Seminary and became a country teacher. Buried in an out-of-the-way village surrounded by dense forest and impassable bogs, he put his mind to the writing of stories and verses about the life of the White-Russia peasantry. Shortly before the outbreak of war in 1914 he had risen to the editorship of a small Nationalist and Democrat newspaper in Vilna. Hence my own literary and journalistic aspirations.

At the commencement of the current century I entered for the juridical faculty of a Gymnasia, but because of my father's poor circumstances I was obliged to leave before the completion of my term, to obtain employment and complete my secondary standard education by attendance at continuation classes.

When, in 1912, I entered for the juridical faculty of the St. Petersburg University pre-war, or more exactly pre-Revolution, Universities had this advantage, that one could there pursue one's studies at no expense beyond the first and final fee of twenty-five roubles, the cost of the subsequent five years' study being borne by various endowments, stipends, charitable institutions, etc.

I enjoyed the benefit of these stipends no longer than I could help, for I soon began work with the *Novoye Vremya*—the second largest and most influential paper in pre-Revolution Russia—until the October Revolution liquidated, first the Right Wing Press, then the Liberal, the Socialist, and finally all but its own Party Press.

From 1918 onwards there began for us Soviet life in the strict sense of the word: hunger, evacuation, arrests, homelessness, and so forth. The wave of refugees rolled from St. Petersburg to Moscow, from Moscow to Kiev, from Kiev to Odessa, from Odessa to Constantinople. I never reached Constantinople, as, when the White Russian army evacuated from Odessa, I was laid up with typhus.

After convalescence, my very varied activities in the Soviet arena began—sanitarian, fisherman, stevedore, book-keeper, co-operator, photographer, sports instructor and journalist, and other occupations. Further details of my tangled biography the reader may glean from my book.

At the present time, I am in Sofia editing a Russian newspaper *The Voice of Russia*, which paper has its source in the presumption that in our volcanic age—from exile to power is but a step, albeit not an easy step. In exile and prison have begun the activities of Mussolini and Masaryk, Lenin and Hitler, Beneš and Stalin, Pilsudski and Horthy.

We, the anti-Soviet Russians, are scattered, but we are not vanquished. There is a Russian saying which has it that a heavy hammer, crushing glass to powder, beats out steel. If there is no English equivalent for this saying, one ought to be made.

My brother Boris works here with me. My son Yura is pursuing his studies at the Academy of Arts in Vienna, and it is he who draws the wrapper designs for our books.

SOFIA  
Nov. 1937

I. S.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

For valuable assistance in translating this book, I am under obligations to my wife Lubov W. Harrow and my friend Mr. Losseff.

W. H.

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## INTRODUCTORY

*Eyewitnesses*

Any discussion of Soviet Russia involves substantial difficulties. These difficulties are aggravated by the number of contradictions in the evidence of so-called eyewitnesses, and the even more contradictory deductions drawn from their reports.

The public has sufficient reason to distrust, on the ground of bias, the reports of emigrés. Equally, visitors to the Soviets from abroad, despite the most honest intentions, are rarely able to see and report the essentials. Unfortunately, most of these visitors come only to obtain facts confirmatory of convictions firmly established prior to their visit. And certainly, in such cases, "He who seeks can find."

Foreign observers who wish to discover the positive value of the Communist experiment, are hampered as to the validity of their conclusions by the fact that this is an experiment for which they have not paid, and are not paying. Therefore, the price paid for actual achievements is of no interest to them; that price has already been paid. For the observer, it is thus an experiment free of charge. The results have possible utility, while the incidental vivisection has been performed on the bodies of others.

The "authentic data" obtained in such fashion are generally applied to the principal requirements of the investigator's own group. As a result, a picture is created which scarcely represents the actual Soviet reality. "What should be" achieves an overwhelming preponderance over "what is."

*About the Author*

Since my contemporaries, now in their forties, were young people at the time of the Russian Revolution, they can hardly be included in the so-called 'older generation'; still less can they be included among the Soviet youth forming the Komsomols, regarding whom such fantastic rumours are current abroad.

Nor was I ever a member of aristocratic or wealthy circles. My father came of a poor peasant family settled in the district of Grodno, in North-Western Russia, which is now by the Treaty of Riga included in Poland. By dint of strenuous exertions he raised himself to the position of teacher, and his progress in life was such that just before the Revolution broke out he was able to found a newspaper in Vilna. This organ gradually secured a considerable influence in democratic circles.

After a childhood spent entirely in the country, I obtained at the age of fifteen a position as typist and general assistant on a local newspaper, later becoming secretary to the editor. Owing to a quarrel between my father and the authorities I attended the high school for no longer than three years, but in 1912 I matriculated into the Petrograd University, where I took my degree in law in 1917. During my studies at the University I had worked for a number of newspapers.

My degree proved of no value to me, as the Bolshevik régime had no need of jurists. Terror at that time usurped the place of law. It was this reign of Terror which finally estranged the youthful Intelligentsia, who, possessing neither capital nor land, had at first anticipated no injury from Bolshevik rule. They were mistaken. In the long run, the Soviet Revolution ruined, both materially and morally, every one in Russia. During the turbulent years



that followed there was no free Press, and consequently no outlet for learning or experience, no matter how painfully acquired. Only zealous party members, prepared to praise the Soviet leaders to the skies, to justify the Reign of Terror and vilify their opponents, could find employment on the Communist Press.

Our family being traditionally interested in athletics, which was rather unusual in pre-war Russia, I adopted Sport as my profession. My two younger brothers and myself had been trained in every department of athletics, and two of us distinguished ourselves in the Russian Olympiad in 1914. Although I had chosen Sport as being the profession farthest removed from politics, this did not prevent my arrest by the G.P.U. on eleven separate occasions. Yet this record scarcely exceeds the average for most Russian citizens to-day.

As the years rolled by there was little, if any, abatement of either Terror or Hunger. We decided to escape—my wife, my son, my younger brother Boris, and myself. My other brother had died during the Civil War.

At this time my son was only nine, and too young for any attempt at flight across the border, so that some less direct means of escape was necessary. With this aim we sought employment with some Soviet agency abroad. As she spoke five languages, my wife was able to secure a post in Berlin, and received permission to take her son with her. While my brother and I were planning to escape, my brother was arrested for alleged peccadilloes committed while he was a scout master, and was banished to the dreaded Solovetsky Islands for five years. My own plans to escape had to be abandoned, as my brother would surely have been put to death had they succeeded.

I took advantage of my position in the world of sport

to travel all over Russia, including the Ukraine, the Don and Kuban districts, North Caucasus, Trans-Caucasus, Middle Asia, the Urals, Karelia, and other regions. Writing articles on sport for magazines and the Moscow tourist bureaus gave me an opportunity to visit every Soviet institution of importance and to collect abundant material for future use in contributions to the foreign Press on contemporary Soviet life.

In 1930 my wife, together with our son, was ordered back to Moscow. As he was an experienced film operator, I was able to take him with me on my travels, which were usually performed on foot. In 1932 my brother Boris was transferred to Orel, and my wife received permission to go abroad again. That autumn marked our first attempt to escape, which failed. In 1933 we made a second attempt, even less successful. It led to our arrest and banishment to a Concentration Camp, my brother and I with eight-year sentences, my son with three. From Camp we made our final and successful attempt to escape.

The fact that I fled from the Soviet Union may cause the reader to regard my testimony as being prejudiced. It should, however, be borne in mind that I was sent to a Concentration Camp because I attempted to escape in the first place. It was not, therefore, the conditions of life in Concentration Camps which impelled my escape, but the general atmosphere in Russia itself.

My brother, my son, and myself chose to risk our lives rather than continue to live in a 'socialistic' country; nor were we influenced by economic considerations. My own material position was far better than that of the vast majority of the Intelligentsia. Even my brother, who, when we made our first attempt, was in exile, lived far better than the average Russian workman.

It should be pointed out that the standard of life of a Soviet engineer is much lower than that of a Finnish workman; while that of a Russian workman means semi-starvation.

Thus, the general purport of this book is not coloured by any personal grievance. The Revolution did not deprive me of my capital, landed estates, or other possessions, for the simple reason that I had none. Nor had I any personal grudge against the G.P.U. We were banished to the Concentration Camp for the specific crime of attempting to escape from the 'Socialist Paradise'.

Six months later a law was passed which punished this attempt with death. Even a friend of the Soviet Union must concede that the joys of this paradise cannot be superabundant, if all its exits have to be blocked by such effective means.

I spent seventeen years covering, usually with a notebook, nearly all of Soviet Russia. What I then endured, and what I then saw, made it morally impossible for me to remain. My personal hardships as a citizen weighed little with me in forming my decision. This will be made plain at greater length hereafter.

### *Government and People*

The Soviet Government has constructed a machine of coercion which is unparalleled in history. Yet this machine encounters resistance almost equally powerful. These two prodigious forces are at grips in a tragic struggle of unequalled intensity. Meanwhile, the Government is approaching breaking-point under the strain of its problems, while the country is suffocating beneath unspeakable oppression.

The primary aim of the Soviets is World Revolution. Since hope for its speedy realisation must be postponed

indefinitely, Soviet Russia has perforce been transformed into a psychological forcing bed and military drill ground in order to preserve the forces of Revolution, its intricate organisation, its wealth of experience, and its army.

The people care little for World Revolution, and are reluctant to sacrifice their belongings, much less their lives, to this cause. Power is on the side of the Government, numbers on the side of the people. The line of demarcation is sharp—the resultant struggle recalls the atrocities of the Middle Ages.

These atrocities are not visible in Moscow or Leningrad, districts wholly conquered by the Government. The real struggle is proceeding in the factories and mills and on the steppes of the Ukraine and Middle Asia, in the Caucasus, in the forests of Siberia, and in the Far North. It is more deadly now by far than during the military communism of the Civil War—hence the enormous population of the Camps.

### *The Concentration Camps*

Previous descriptions of the Camps have stressed the general horror of their atmosphere and the personal sufferings of more or less innocent prisoners. My object is not to arouse sympathy or compassion, but to awaken comprehension. I found in the Camps the easiest place to grasp the fundamental principles of a struggle which is raging more or less over the whole area under Soviet domination.

The Concentration Camp, in my view, differs little from the so-called freedom of the Russian world outside. For most of the prisoners—the workmen and the peasants—the differences are slight indeed. Everything that takes place in the Camps may easily happen outside, and vice versa. The only distinction is that in Camp every-

thing occurs openly, frankly, simply. Here there is no need for special publicity, for an 'ideological super-structure', for kid-glove pretences, for exhibitions of Socialism for the benefit of the foreign observer. In a Camp the fundamentals of Soviet rule are presented with all the bareness of algebraic formulae. The story of my life in Camp and of my escape will show that I have interpreted these signs correctly.

Pages of my narrative may well appear cynical. It is, indeed, far from my thought to represent myself as an innocent lamb in this terrible struggle on the public stage of Soviet Russia, where the lamb has become an extinct animal. Yet my story is one of life and death, and not of my life alone. The picture is not exclusively one of blood-thirsty executioners on the one side and submissive victims on the other. During all these years of struggle, the people have devised all manner of tricks and stratagems, not always too scrupulous, as well as a thousand varieties of camouflage and of open resistance. The sufferers deserve no halo. This book of mine portrays the life of the Soviets as I saw it.

*The Empire of the G.P.U.*

The policy of collectivisation multiplied the number of Concentration Camps and increased their population to an appalling degree. The Camps ceased to serve as penal institutions for counter-revolutionaries and criminals, of which the Solovetsky Islands was the most notorious example, and became dense concentration points for unremunerated conscript labour, directed by the G.P.U.

The theoretical boundary line between Camp incarceration and freedom is gradually disappearing. As comparative liberty for Camp inmates continues to increase, the enslavement of the free population outside develops in

equal measure. The Camp is by no means an underworld of imprisonment; it is rather a normal part of Soviet life. If we imagine its inmates somewhat better clothed and fed, and having a diminished dread of the firing squads, we are actually contemplating a realistic picture of the Soviets of the future, provided nothing disturbs the present so-called 'peaceful' evolution. As the Russian proverb says, "a bad peace is better than open warfare". The Soviet freedom of to-day shows small improvement over the Concentration Camp.

The Camp to which we were first sent was the 'White Sea-Baltic Combine', called W.B.C. for short. A kingdom in extent, it spreads from Petrozavodsk to Murmansk, near the Arctic Ocean. It contains its own timber industry, including vast forests, its own quarries, factories, mills, railroads, wharves, and steamboats. It is divided into nine units, each comprising from five to twenty-seven Camps, having a population ranging from five hundred to twenty-five thousand. Most of these Camps also include subsidiary small adjacent settlements.

The railway station, Medgora, is both the administrative centre of a subdivision and the Government seat of the so-called autonomous republic of Karelia. When the Concentration Camp absorbed this republic, the Camp Administration seized all its territory, and, in obedience to an order from Stalin, regulating the organisation of the 'White Sea-Baltic Combine', assumed all the functions of the previous Karelian Government, which henceforth became a mere 'office boy' under the Medgora administration, and, for national purposes, an ornamental façade representing Karelia.

During my incarceration I was able to ascertain that in July 1934 the Concentration Camps of the W.B.C.,

although then decreasing in size, comprised 286,000 men. This decrease was due to the completion of the White Sea Canal, and the subsequent despatch of an enormous number of prisoners to another project—the Baikal-Amur Line in Siberia. The Svir Camp, independent of the W.B.C. group, in the planning section of which I was employed during March of the same year, was a relatively small Camp of 78,000 prisoners only.

During my work in the statistical section of the W.B.C. I had to deal with the transfer of prisoners from Camp to Camp. This enabled me to estimate roughly the number of prisoners in the various Concentration Camps of the U.S.S.R. As a basis, I used the exact figures for the W.B.C. Camps and the Camps on the River Svir. The B.A.M., the Siblag (Siberia Camp), and Dmitlag (Moscow Volga) are larger than the W.B.C., but the majority of Camps are smaller. Of these last, the number is legion, and includes tiny Camps in various sovkhoses.<sup>1</sup>

The cities often have their own Concentration Camps, for such special purposes as the building of houses under the G.P.U. in Moscow and in Leningrad, and the erection of a Stadium for sport. In addition, there are scores of medium-sized Camps. I estimate the total population in the Concentration Camps at not less than five millions, and this is probably a conservative figure. Knowing, as I do, the statistical methods employed in all the Camps, I doubt whether the actual number of prisoners, even within some hundreds of thousands, is known to the G.P.U. itself.

My figures relate to the prisoners in the actual Concentration Camps, and do not include other groups, more or

<sup>1</sup> The sovkhos is a landed estate under State management, the kolkhoz—a collective farm.

less subject to confinement. Such, for instance, were some 28,000 families of so-called 'special-settlers', which consisted of peasants from the district of Voroniez, banished because of their opposition to collectivisation, or because of their religious beliefs. These peasants were, under the supervision of the G.P.U., subjected to much worse conditions than the Camp prisoners, since they included entire families who received no food rations. Further, there were countless individuals exiled, as in former days, to Siberia, with this difference, that to-day they receive no allowances from the Government and must shift for themselves as best they can. In addition, the so-called 'voluntary exiles' consist of peasants who have been banished wholesale to districts difficult to cultivate. These, however, are not under the direct supervision of the G.P.U.

As to the totals embraced by these categories, not even approximate figures are available. Probably the number is enormous, and largely includes the flower of the nation. My own view is that not less than 10 % of the adult males in the Soviet Union dwell in the Camps or near them. So vast a number is, of course, unprecedented in the history of Europe; one must seek for parallels in the reign of Ivan the Terrible or the ancient empire of the Assyrians.

"The Assyrians invented a system which promised them better results in their conquest of countries where they encountered a stubborn resistance or frequent rebellions. They paralysed the forces of the conquered nation by taking away their heads, the leading classes, the most eminent, the best educated, in short those most capable of resistance. All these they banished to some remote region, where, separated from home and country, they were rendered completely powerless. The peasants, artisans and small tradesmen left in the conquered land,



were a loosely united mass, unable to offer resistance to the conquerors. . . ." (K. Kautsky, *Ursprung des Christentums*.)

The Soviet Government, as has been said, 'meets everywhere with stubborn resistance and repeated insurrections'. In the event of foreign complication, it has every reason to expect a rising of formidable dimensions, such as has never occurred before, even during periods of greatest oppression. Herein lies the reason for employing the Assyrian method. Every individual or group, capable of independent thought of the smallest resistance to the common levelling process, is liable to banishment or suppression, as a matter of course.

### *The Future*

Obviously, the vast population of the Concentration Camps scarcely countenances the current phrases about 'peaceful evolution' and the 'liquidation of terror'. These phrases arise from the tendency to confuse the ideal with the real. Within the Soviet Union nothing is heard of such notions, and when people discuss them in the outside world, the effect resembles lightning out of a clear sky. The 'protection of the fatherland' as the policy of the present ruling powers, is the subject of some internal debate, but is not discussed very seriously.

Whatever may be the chance of 'peaceful evolution' in the future, one fact must always be borne in mind. The following quotation is from an article in the *Last News* by the former Red Commander, Trienin (now escaped to France): "The country is awaiting war to give it a chance for insurrection. There need be no talk whatever about the defence of the 'socialistic fatherland' upon the part of the masses of the population. On the contrary, no matter with whom the war were fought, nor what military ruin were threatened—every bayonet and pitchfork which

could possibly be stuck in the backs of the Red Army would certainly be driven home. Every peasant knows it, as does every Communist. Every peasant knows that as soon as the first shot is fired he will immediately stab the president of the nearest village soviet, president of the kolkhoz, etc., and these latter understand quite clearly that on that day they will be slaughtered like sheep."

It is impossible to forecast the reaction of the masses to religion, monarchy, or republic, but their reaction to war is so definitely predictable as to admit of no mistake. Knowing conditions throughout the Soviet Union as thoroughly as I do, I can clearly visualise what would happen within a day or two of war: the contemporary military communism would seem child's play in comparison. I have already seen such conditions in Kirghizia, in the North Caucasus, in Chechnia. The Communists are perfectly aware of this. It may still be possible to deceive people in Harbin or Paris, but it is impossible to delude the inhabitants of the Concentration Camps or the kolkhoz any longer.

In view of these considerations, Bolshevik military plans contemplate the possibilities of revolt both at home and abroad. To quote a high Red Commander: "The question is who would revolt first, our masses or those of our adversaries? In any event, the first revolt would break out in the rear of the side in retreat. Therefore, we must attack—and we will attack."

The result of the next war may well be World Revolution. Foreign pacifists and idealists, striving to promote friendship with the Soviets at any price, might heed this warning.

## WHITE SEA-BALTIC COMBINE (W.B.C.)

*Solitary Confinement*

My cell is dark and moist. Every morning I wipe off, with a rag, little streams of water from the walls and mop up little pools from the floor. By noon the floor is once more covered with little pools.

My daily rations are thrust into the cell through a small window in the door. They consist of a pound of scarcely edible black bread, with a cup of boiling water, at 7 a.m.; a small plate of barley porridge at noon; a plate of liquid, supposed to be soup, and another small portion of barley porridge in the evening.

Four steps forward and four steps back mark the limits of the narrow cell. Exercise outside the cell is forbidden. No books or newspapers are permitted inside. No intercourse with the outer world is permitted. Our arrest occurred through treachery, and no one may know our whereabouts. My brother Boris and my son Yura occupy similar solitary cells.

For weeks I see neither prison inspector nor guard—only a hand pushing in my food, or an eye staring at me through the window at fifteen-minute intervals. The possessor of this eye moves as silently as a ghost. The complete stillness of the felt-covered corridor is broken only by the jangling of keys, or the sound of doors opening or clanging as they close. Occasionally, a wild

cry: "Comrades, brothers, I am taken to be slaughtered," is succeeded by complete silence once more.

Some night I may, in similar fashion, be led to execution. On the other hand, I trust I shall evade this fate. Previous to the semi-starvation of this 'Socialist paradise', I possessed enormous physical strength. I still take my daily gymnastic exercises, recalling always the student of Andreev's story *The Seven Who Were Hanged*. I hope for strength to break the bones of the people who, some night, may enter my cell, and thus compel them to shoot me at once.

Yet they may succeed in seizing me unawares in my sleep, and I may yet have to pass along that mournful way, travelled before by so many thousand men with their arms twisted and tied behind them, down, down, deep in the mysterious cellars of the G.P.U., awaiting with failing courage the end—the cold muzzle of a revolver against my neck.

And what of Boris? His previous banishment to the Solovetsky Islands is against him, but he too possesses enormous strength, and will hardly submit quietly to killing. And what of my Yura, a boy not yet eighteen? Will they perhaps have mercy on him? When I think of his tall youthful figure, his curly head . . . in Kiev, I have seen the heads of people who had been shot at close quarters with a revolver. The bullet split, and instead of the brains oozing out, they were pushed out in a lump. When I think of Yura treading that doleful path, and of his head . . . no, I can't think about it . . . I am heart-sick and cold, and my brain reels. If I could only do something, however desperate!

If only I could stop thinking—the long sleepless nights drag so mercilessly. At repeated intervals a mysterious

eye keeps peering into my cell through the small grille in the door. The faint gleam of the electric lamp helps little. In the constant draught oozing moisture is blown from the walls. How can one, during such nights, control one's thoughts ?

Thinking of the future will not help. Somewhere in the mysterious files of 'Shpalerka Prison' in Leningrad there must already exist some scrap of paper on which my fate is written, and the destinies of my brother and my son as well. After all, it is written, and I cannot change it. It is an old saying that the whole of a man's life passes in a flash before his eyes when he is about to drown. It is equally true of me. My thoughts continually revert to the past. I re-live all the years of the Revolution in every detail, as though I were my own confessor. A confessor the more severe in that I, as the eldest, the instigator and organiser of our attempt to escape, am responsible for the lives of others besides my own. And I must admit a technical error, a mistake that was mine.

### *An Error on My Part*

Yes, it was a technical error on my part, as a result of which we are at present prisoners; unless it may have lain still deeper in our natures, this decision to escape from the Soviets. Might we not, like millions of others, have endured the tragic ordeal, as one step towards the unknown future? Was it really impossible to live in the U.S.S.R. Was there no gleam of hope?

Our determination to escape was no sudden impulse. It had matured through several years of comparative peace, during which we had been far more fortunate as to living conditions than most of the 'qualified Intelligentsia'. Even Boris, despite the trying experience of his

exile in the Solovetsky Islands, had been more fortunate than most.

During the terrible winters of 1928-30, when so many in Moscow died of cold or hunger, I lived in the village of Saltykovka nearby, from which place many people, unable to obtain living quarters in the town, travelled to and from the city daily. My work taking me from place to place I was able to avoid Moscow, where the crowds, dirt, vermin, and general congestion disgusted me. (Living quarters in town are limited, by Soviet law, to a definite number of square yards per person.) In Saltykovka, I had an attic of my own with ample space, and freedom from the annoyance of gossiping or eavesdropping neighbours, squalling infants, or smelly kerosene stoves. There one could protect oneself in a measure from hunger and cold, from the struggle for more space, and from the inspections of the House Committees.

In summer we fished and gathered mushrooms. In autumn we dug tree stumps for firewood. These resources were, of course, insufficient, and there were, moreover, times when it was impossible to obtain in Moscow, irrespective of price, anything beyond regular food-card rations—except illegally. At such times we had to depend on underground supplies, as, for instance, during one winter of famine, on caviare and potatoes! I mean the genuine wholesome black caviare, not the inedible mushroom-caviare at three roubles a kilogram,<sup>1</sup> which even the workers could scarcely eat. But we could obtain no bread.

This was a period of shortage of foodstuffs, even for foreigners, despite the often-quoted efficiency and pros-

<sup>1</sup> 2½ pounds.

perity 'unexampled in the History of the Masses'. The famous establishment of Jelisseieff Brothers had been turned into a liquor and provision emporium for foreigners which, with another special store in the Kremlin, catered for the various foreign specialists and for members of the Comintern. Each of these owned a booklet, permitting monthly rations of various foods, the amount (seldom very large) varying with the importance of the possessor. Necessaries like bread, sugar, and potatoes were strictly rationed. Caviare, salmon, wine, and luxuries generally could be bought in unlimited quantities, and both necessities and luxuries were priced far below regular market charges.

No Russians, except officials, were permitted to deal at these shops. However, I disguised myself in an English overcoat of special cut, and sported the one expensive cigar I still kept for display on special occasions. Thus attired, I passed with dignity the G.P.U. guard at the door, and when he asked for my booklet I merely thrust a hand majestically in an inside pocket, and waved him aside. Once in the store, everything was simple enough. Bread was strictly rationed, and unobtainable without a food card. Potatoes served with caviare are liable to become monotonous; nevertheless, since there is no bread let us welcome the honest 'proletarian' caviare. This cost at the time 22 roubles a kilogram—about 3s. Rockefeller himself could hardly have afforded the quantities we obtained in Soviet Saltykovka!

As regards potatoes, the business had to be managed otherwise. Instead of my English overcoat, I donned my most disreputable garments and sought the alleys on Moscow's outskirts, to encounter peasant women of suspiciously honest aspect. I would look at one, and she

would return my glance. "Any potatoes?" I would whisper. "Who ever has potatoes?" might be the reply, while the speaker sized me up. Then would come the further question: "Do you want some?"

Somewhere in a backyard a little boy or girl would be found sitting on a heap of rags under which would be hidden the coveted little sacks of potatoes, brought in from the country with so much toil and danger. For these I would have to pay five or six roubles a kilogram.

Bread proved to be unobtainable, and several attempts to get it under the food-card system ended in failure. This system was stated by the Press to have been greeted with 'Enthusiasm' by the proletariat. In our experience the 'enthusiasm' was confined to the newspapers.

In operation, the system was not devoid of a certain grim humour. All being in the Soviet service, we three had cards entitling the holder to bread, to 800 grammes<sup>1</sup> of sugar monthly, and to other products rarely obtainable.

Each card was allocated to a different district in Moscow, widely separated and impossible to reach in a short time by a single person. At each place you have to stand in a long queue, only to be told when you finally reach the counter that there is no more bread, nor is there any sugar. Maybe it will be available to-morrow, or in a few days. On another visit you will be told you should have come the day before, when plenty of everything was on hand. Finally, your card is cancelled as no longer valid. My nerves and temper could not endure these farcical proceedings for more than a week. I told my wife, finally, that the whole arrangement was a shameful indignity which I would suffer no longer. Moreover, in the time thus wasted, I could earn enough to buy in the open

<sup>1</sup> Nearly 2 pounds.



market. In the end I tore up the cards in a rage, and dealt with the shop for foreigners, as I have already stated.

### *Moral*

My dealings with the shop for foreigners were, of course, a form of swindle. But swindling has become a general practice in the U.S.S.R., not excluding even the Government itself. The State pays me in roubles, alleged to be exchangeable for gold at par. But the actual market value of such a rouble is little more than a kopek, though the official Government organ, *Izvestia*, continues to quote it at its pre-war value of two shillings. For seventeen years the State has thus increasingly defrauded all its subjects, whether white-collar workers, factory workers, or peasants. All classes cheat the State in return when they can, with varying punishments if discovered, up to the death penalty in the case of the moujiks, and with far greater severity towards the workmen than the Intelligentsia.

If in cheating the State we cheated ourselves, that would be foolish enough. But the State, so-called, is in reality the World Revolution, and we know that much of what is stolen from us is used in preparing for the Communist World State of the future: we know also that the money stolen from us is used to finance revolutionary activities among the labouring classes in every country under the direction of the Comintern gang. So we continue to steal whenever we can!

### *The Theory of Mutual Swindling*

In theory, we are to eat as little as possible, while working our hardest, so as to inaugurate the Revolu-

tionary World State. But intelligent work is impossible under such conditions. The workman's output is reduced, the peasant's harvest diminishes to the point where most of the population goes hungry. I myself am reduced to a condition where I must cheat or perish.

My work being in the field of sports I am compelled to expatiate on and extol the gigantic Moscow Stadium Project. Although the purpose of this undertaking is to impress foreigners with the immense progress made in physical culture, I cannot help being aware that not even the most primitive sports are available to the workers generally, and that at the Ski stations people must stand in line for hours together waiting their turn for a short run. While personally opposed to the Stadium Project, which is really conducted in the interest of World Revolution, I dare not protest nor abstain from praise.

When I write about Daghestan the censor will delete the slightest hint to the effect that the population of the plains is being exterminated by malaria; and none the less, recruits from the Ukraine and Kuban continue to arrive, only to face a certain death.

Nor can I allude to the Government's inability to afford quinine for Daghestan, because of the expenditure devoted to World Revolution projects.

While people continue to give me information concerning horrors resulting from disease which cause me almost to burst with shame, I must go on declaring in the public Press that everything is in perfect order. When I visited Kirghizia it was obviously necessary for me to write something concerning my visit. But what I saw was the appalling ruin of the live-stock industry, the chaos of the sovkhoses, the misery of the Concentration Camps on the Tchew River, and the deported, tattered, and hungry

kulaks from the Ukraine, all dreadful things that I could not write about. Only by a miracle did I escape from the revolt occasioned by these conditions, during which the Kirghizians would have slaughtered me like a sheep, simply because I was a Russian from Moscow. It is evident that all I can do is to lie.

I lie when I interpret for foreigners. I lie when I report on the benefits of the present system of physical culture, contrasted with the former alleged prohibition of workers' participation in sports. I lie in compiling statistics of Soviet physical culture which my colleagues and I have to concoct for foreign consumption.

All these mendacities seem to me much worse than buying under false pretences from the foreigners' store. Worse still, when my son contracted typhoid, I had to steal the urgently required kerosene from the military co-operative, where I served as instructor. With two pints of kerosene bulging under my coat, I encountered a sentinel; he knew what I carried, but refrained from searching me, which would have resulted in my being shot.

Prior to the Revolution I owned no property; so that I forfeited nothing which I might have recovered in the event of a counter-revolution. What I lost was seventeen years of life, wasted irrevocably in this lunatic asylum of Soviet forced labour. In losing only seventeen years, I really got off easily. It must be remembered that tens of millions paid with all their years, with life itself.

For a while I hoped that from this vast area of Russia, fertilised with millions of corpses, enriched with years of inhuman labour, secured at the cost of incredible deprivation, there might finally emerge something resembling a normal order of life. Finally, I realised that all this vast

sacrifice might serve to promote World Revolution, but would do nothing for Russia itself.

For seventeen years my disgust increased in proportion with the Soviet system of pressure, which began like a steam-hammer whose noise was audible throughout the globe, but ended in the deadly silence of a hydraulic press, gradually crushing out all life. A man can tolerate being robbed of his clothing at the point of a revolver, but when, under the same treatment, enthusiasm is demanded in addition, disgust develops beyond endurance. It was this abhorrence which finally urged us to the Finnish frontier.

### *Miscalculations*

For a long time ill-luck or destiny—call it whatever you will—hung over all our efforts to escape. Our first attempt was in the autumn of 1932. I had previously visited Karelia to study the terrain, when I obtained all the information that was necessary for our project and was supplied with all the necessary official documents. Our actual start was somewhat delayed, owing to family circumstances, until the latter part of September—too advanced a season for normal Karelian climatic conditions. We had, in fact, considered the advisability of a year's postponement. However, the Moscow Weather Bureau assured me, on application, that Karelia had suffered a complete drought during August and September, which would, consequently, remove the menace of the Karelian marshes. Accordingly we started.

We soon discovered that after sixty days of continual rainfall the marshes were impassable, and after four days of floundering we returned and decided not to try again until the June of the coming year. Our failure was due to



THE AUTHOR IN FINLAND ON THE DAY AFTER  
THE FLIGHT

our inability to appreciate the typical Soviet unreliability of the Moscow Weather Bureau!

On June 8, 1933, the day appointed for starting, my sister-in-law, Irene, arrived in Moscow to receive the railway tickets, previously ordered. Unfortunately, Yura woke up with a pain in his side. Boris examined him and found evidence of appendicitis, whereupon he hurried to Moscow to get a refund on the tickets. Two other doctors whom I called in confirmed Boris's diagnosis. Accordingly, our attempt was again postponed, and, instead, Yura was operated upon. Further attempts at escape would have to be abandoned until his complete recovery about the beginning of September.

Despite diminished ardour, our original group—my brother, his wife, my son, and myself—represented a closely knit and determined family group. The fifth member was accidental: an old book-keeper whom we may call Stepanov, who was absolutely alone in the U.S.S.R. Though timid and unable to play more than a purely passive rôle, we had confidence in his honesty. Besides these five, one additional person knew of our project, and from this fact arose disaster.

Mrs. E. was the wife of an old friend, Josef Antonovich, and a member of a rich and well-known Polish family. By no means clever, [like many women of her type, she imagined herself a born diplomatist. This energetic, if conceited, woman suddenly appeared in our midst at Saltykovka, three weeks prior to our projected departure, accompanied by a man named Babenko, whom I had seen on several occasions at drinking parties given by Josef Antonovich.

Astonished by this unexpected visit, I was still more surprised when Mrs. E. begged permission to join us, together with her lover.

This unexpected arrival disconcerted us, since it was obvious, in spite of Mrs. E.'s denials, that Babenko was already aware of our intentions.

We had no doubts concerning Mrs. E.'s loyalty, but as to Babenko—he might be an *agent provocateur*, which would mean the failure of our enterprise at the least! If honest, he could as a former officer with excellent sight compared with our own eyesight, and familiar with the woods, be very useful. We tested his knowledge of forestry and hunting, but were less convinced as to his career in the artillery. We were the more sceptical when he claimed to be able to hit with the 'nagan' a target the size of a man at five hundred yards, a performance which I knew to be impossible, as any artillery officer would have agreed.

However, our suspicions about Babenko helped us not at all. If he were a Government Agent, we must be under observation by the G.P.U. On the other hand, it seemed absurd that Babenko should betray us, as Mrs. E.'s large estates in Poland, which, as her lover, he might hope to possess, should have been an attraction greater by far than any problematical Soviet reward for treachery.

Between our surmises and misgivings it was, indeed, a difficult time. We might, of course, at great risk and with unusually good fortune, mislead the G.P.U. by deflecting our route to the Persian frontier, which would mean parting with money and documents that were badly needed. However, we set off somewhat oppressed.

Mrs. E. was allowed to leave legally via Intourist, so that she was not with us. Babenko was to meet us in Leningrad, and did so, quickly and skilfully securing our tickets and places on the train to Shuiskaya on the Murmansk railway.

We were too perturbed to carry ourselves easily. I

remember vaguely that our car was the last on the train and that our reserved seats were in different parts of the coach; nor would the conductor permit us to sit together even when the other passengers had agreed to this arrangement. All this, as well as the glances of the rest of the passengers, decidedly strengthened my suspicions. In the evening we all assembled in one car, while Babenko poured tea, after which I suddenly became drowsy and sank into a heavy sleep, although I had recently been troubled with insomnia.

Suddenly someone touched me and, still half asleep, I threw him against the opposite wall, his head striking it with a thump. Another man grasped my head, another my knees, a third my throat, and I saw the muzzles of three or four revolvers facing me. Suddenly, in a flash of enlightenment, I realised the truth.

The air was filled with the noise of fighting, with the clamour of the G.P.U. men—with the hysterical screaming of Stepanov, with dreadful groans. The other occupants of the car, previously disguised, united in the attack. While an alleged engineer held his Colt in my face and bawled "hands up", other men held my arms and placed handcuffs on my wrists, so that I could not possibly raise them. The supposed book-keeper still clung to my legs, while the man I had thrown against the wall drew a weapon from his pocket. The whole compartment seemed alive with revolvers.

I was seated near a window, and noticed that we were returning towards Leningrad. Our coach had been uncoupled from the rest of the train, and connected with the next Leningrad train.

The handcuffs were too small and dug into my flesh. The three men who remained in the compartment to



guard me knew me personally, and were polite enough. The G.P.U. had apparently mobilised half of the heavy athletes in the Leningrad 'Dynamo' sports society to arrest us with a minimum of noise and trouble. It was cleverly done, though at needless expense—but what difference does expense make to the G.P.U.? They could as easily charter a whole train as a single coach.

Our weapons, consisting of two double-barrelled shot-guns, one small carbine, and a Browning, were now useless and lay on the shelf above us. In the forest, with a short range of visibility, they would have been a formidable collection, but here the game was up. The first 'engineer', who had stuck the revolver under my nose, was manager of our 'expeditionary force', and was named Dobrotin. Passing through the coach, under escort, to the toilet, I managed to exchange smiles with Boris and Yura. All except Irene were handcuffed. Poor Stepanov looked utterly miserable, never having suspected such treachery. Babenko, with a look of injured innocence, was also handcuffed, which seemed a poor masquerade in such a spectacular effort. Later at G.P.U. headquarters Dobrotin tried unsuccessfully to remove the shackles from my wrists, which had swollen up like pillows. Boris, already free of his shackles, made fun of him the while.

After that, with such calmness as we could summon, we took leave of each other. Later I was taken up a flight of narrow concrete stairs and through an almost endless labyrinth of corridors. After a two hours' search of my person, I was thrust into solitary confinement in a narrow cell, four steps each way. Then followed the anguish of sleepless nights, the clanging of cell doors, worry, and depression.

*The Examination*

In the solitary confinement section which I inhabit the corridors are felt-covered, scrupulously clean, but terribly cold. There are niches in the massive walls leading to the cells.

The guard calls me out, and orders: "Right", "Down", "Left".

At the corner I catch sight of another prisoner, who immediately steps into a niche at the order of his guard. I catch but a passing glimpse of his pale, emaciated, bearded face.

I am ushered into an office, where, to my astonishment, I find Dobrotin himself behind an enormous official desk, waiting to examine me. His hands no longer tremble, and a friendly smile appears on his round, well-fed, contented face.

I realise he has every reason for satisfaction, since he captured us so easily. He has arrested an 'armed group', and has now on his hands a serious charge with a solid foundation. Not every day, nor even every month, does the Leningrad G.P.U. discover one 'real pearl' of armed counter-revolution, despite all its advantages of provocation, including 'khalturas', denunciations, 'fictions', and other tragic folly.

Dobrotin rises, beaming, and extends his hand, saying: "Sit down, please, Ivan Lukianovich."

I seat myself, and contemplate the features of my adversary. I light the cigarette he hands me, and feel a certain dizziness; it's more than two weeks since I last smoked.

"Will you have tea?"

"Of course I will." In a few minutes it appears—real tea, with sugar and lemon, such as one scarcely ever enjoys when at liberty.

"Of course, Ivan Lukianovich," begins Dobrotin, "you understand that we know everything, and that your best policy is to lay your cards on the table."

Since he holds all the cards, I scarcely know how to play. Short of his being an absolute fool, which I can scarcely suppose, he has the statements of Mrs. E., of Babenko, and, worst of all, of Stepanov. What this poor devil might confess in his panic baffles the imagination.

My nerves are soothed by the tea and cigarettes. I am able to observe Dobrotin calmly and closely: to anticipate his charges and build up my defence.

"If you follow my advice, Ivan Lukianovich, you'll be in no personal danger. We're not butchers—we don't even habitually shoot dangerous criminals. Through that window," which he indicated with a gesture, "you may see the new building we are finishing in the G.P.U. yard. The work is being done by men under the death sentence, who are respiting themselves through their labour. Our policy is not to punish, but to reform."

Sitting in my arm-chair smoking, I realise that this friendly overture augurs evil. Dobrotin, trying to circumvent me, desires to magnify our crime, and, if possible, involve divers others—whom, I don't know.

"As an intelligent man, the course of your case depends mainly on you—the fate of your relatives—your son, your brother. I'm a human creature, as well as an officer of justice. Remember, your son is still so young."

Tut! Tut! I think to myself. Is this a G.P.U. investigation or a sermon? "Comrade Dobrotin," I reply, "you have just stated that you don't consider us dangerous criminals; then why, tell me, such elaborate arrangements for our arrest—a separate railway coach, and almost forty men?"

"From the point of view of the Soviets, you aren't dangerous; but the personal safety of our men has to be considered. We are well enough informed regarding your athletic achievements; and, after all, your brother did break the arm of one of our agents."

"So that also is held against us?"

"Oh, no, that's nothing; but had we sent fewer men, he might have broken the bones of all, unless we had begun to shoot. Your brother is a foolhardy fellow."

"No wonder, after you've sent him from one prison to another for five years and for no real reason."

"I disagree as to there being no real reason, and to us the chances of his reform seem doubtful. His punishment will be difficult to mitigate without substantial assistance from you."

Dobrotin gives me a look which I interpret to mean: Either I sign everything he wishes, or else? I have no idea what he will wish me to sign. Probably I shall have to refuse, and in that case, what next?

"The whole matter seems to me quite simple, Comrade Dobrotin—I have only to confirm in writing what you already know."

"And how do you know what I know?"

"For goodness' sake! You have, besides 'material proofs', Mrs. E., and finally your Comrade Babenko."

At the mention of Babenko's name, Dobrotin replied, smiling: "There's a separate case against Babenko—'wrecking' in the fishing industry." (This is an official term signifying sabotage with political intent.)

"Humph! So this is the way he's to atone for previous crimes!"

"Tell me, Ivan Lukianovich, who is conducting this inquiry—you or I?"

"I understand you are—but now, I see, the case is as plain to me as to you."

"It's not clear to me in all respects: for instance, where did you get the arms and the documents?"

I explained that Yura, Stepanov, and myself, as members of the Hunters' Union, have the right to possess hunter's guns. Boris had stolen his carbine from the gallery of the Osoaviakhim, a semi-military Society for Chemical Warfare, Defence, and Aviation. Yura had brought the small Browning from abroad. The documents, all genuine, were obtained here and there in perfectly legal and official fashion.

Dobrotin, disappointed, had evidently expected a more complicated plot, in which he might detect accomplices, further clues, or some great 'Pinkerton adventure'. Assuming his knowledge of the difficulties in procuring hunting guns in the U.S.S.R., I tell him how such weapons were obtained by us as equipment for various expeditions in Central Asia, Daghestan, etc. While he tries to entangle me in contradictions, I endeavour to guess at the kind of testimony he is striving to obtain—neither of us succeed.

Dobrotin finally says: "Here is my proposal. I'll have writing paper and materials delivered to your cell, and you'll write your statement, withholding nothing. I must remind you that everything depends on your complete frankness."

Since he still maintained an appearance of good-fellowship, I decided to improve the opportunity.

"When you send the paper, can't you return some of the food that was taken from us?"

While starving in my lonely cell, I had been recalling, with longing, our supplies of sugar, rusks, and lard,

which were now probably being consumed by the Chekists.

"It will be difficult, Ivan Lukianovich, since I have no control over prison administration, and besides, as perishable goods, your supplies have no doubt already been eaten. I've already sent your son something." (Here Dobrotin lied—he had sent nothing.)

"I'll try in the same way to do what I can to lighten your captivity. I hope you understand. . . ."

"Of course, I understand that it's in my interest, as much as yours, to produce a statement as soon as possible, no matter what the result."

Dobrotin understands my hint.

"Be sure, Ivan Lukianovich, it can't have any tragic ending. Good-bye for the present."

As I got up, I noticed a large Colt, cocked, on the shelf of his desk. Dobrotin had been ready for all emergencies.

### *Stepanov's Essay in Romance*

Momentary politeness, even in a hangman, has its points; it is, at all times, more agreeable than threats of shooting. But it is necessarily restricted to the moment—I can't credit Dobrotin's promises, nor his 'crocodile effusions' about Yura's youth. Yura will in all likelihood end in a Concentration Camp. Ultimately, being no mere tender youth, he'll be inclined to avenge the death of his father and uncle, and, in consequence, be shot himself.

Stepanov, having been unarmed, and little implicated, should suffer much less. An old book-keeper, without relatives, without interest in politics, his only offence had been an attempt, at the risk of his life, to end his days in his Fatherland.

I write my statement immediately, send it to Dobrotin

by a guard, and await a continuation of the inquiry and an attempt to obtain a finished work of fiction from me also. In a few days I am called for further examination.

Dobrotin receives me with complete politeness, but with evident disappointment.

"I must tell you, Ivan Lukianovich, that your statement is valueless to us, as it contains nothing we don't already know. We're concerned not with your attempt to escape, but with your espionage."

This last word is hurled at me like a cannon-ball, but I continue to observe the speaker with indifference. Dobrotin realises the failure of his attempt, while I continue to smoke the cigarette he has given me, and await further developments.

"With all we know of your activity, Ivan Lukianovich, there's no advantage for you in concealment. But there's a series of separate clues not yet clear to us which we would like unravelled."

"I'm sorry, but there's no way in which I can assist you further."

"Do you mean you intend to deny your activities?"

"In the most categorical manner, since no further activities have ever existed."

"Allow me, Ivan Lukianovich, to remind you that we have the reports of our agents, copies of your correspondence, and finally, a statement from Stepanov, who has confessed everything."

I learned afterwards that Stepanov had been treated with no such politeness as had been shown to me. Dobrotin, with me so perfectly correct, had sworn at him, pounded on the desk with his fists, and threatened to shoot him like a dog. Thereupon Stepanov had responded with incredible flights of fancy, in which he involved

not only his acquaintances, but even strangers. Completely intimidated, he had swamped Dobrotin with an unlimited supply of nonsensical and verbose fiction.

From the opening of the examination, I had realised that Dobrotin's alleged facts were not worth a kopek, that nothing serious had been discovered about me, even by constant observation and censorship of my correspondence. All this had tended completely to discredit Stepanov's imaginative flights. Dobrotin's only hope for a real 'affair', as a contribution towards his advancement, was based on my possible willingness to produce a fictitious story on my own account, and sign it with my name. If all these tales could be credibly reconciled, a case might be established. I had foreign acquaintances and correspondents abroad. From the Soviet view-point, these facts would form a basis for condemnation sufficient in themselves, since acquaintance with foreigners was objectionable, as giving opportunities for observation of Soviet misery and offering bourgeois temptation.

I do not know to this day how the plot of this essay in fiction was woven. Perhaps it was the offspring of Stepanov's fear and Dobrotin's zeal.

An effort had been made to mingle in a single incongruous dish such ingredients as Yura's football friends, the English people who had spent week-ends with us in Saltykovka, my journalistic acquaintances, my journeys through Russia, and anything else that came handy. In all this there was no logic. One assertion contradicted another, and the whole story was palpable nonsense.

However, should I adopt this course, Dobrotin was likely enough to draw up an indictment, based on more reasonable probabilities and quite sufficient for the G.P.U., out of which a new case might be created and



other alleged spies arrested. The better plan seemed to me simply to tell Dobrotin that, since, as he himself said, I was no fool, I neither believed his promises nor feared his threats; that all this was fabulous nonsense and I would on no account sign it.

Accordingly I told Dobrotin just this, and added that, while Stepanov might have been easily frightened, it would not be possible to frighten me in the same way.

Dobrotin changed at once from the well-fed and placidly correct investigator into a scowling and furious prosecutor.

"Ah, then that's what you mean?"

"Yes, that's what *you* mean!"

We looked each other in the eye for several moments. Finally, Dobrotin said, angrily: "We'll force you to confess."

"Most unlikely."

One could note, from the twitching of Dobrotin's facial muscles, the struggle between the European and the Chekist in him. The European was nearly lost, but he was still trying not to assume the Chekist mask. Despite three weeks' semi-starvation, I still had my strength, and felt I had nothing to lose.

"Now see," said Dobrotin, angrily, "I have arranged to give you rusks from your supplies."

"Did you expect to buy a confession with rusks?"

"I didn't expect to buy anything. Take your rusks, and return to your cell."

### *The 'Tribunal'*

When I am summoned for examination the following day, Dobrotin is no longer alone. There are three

additional investigators of higher rank, one in a Chekist uniform with two stripes. The case seems serious.

For nearly five hours I am bombarded with questions by the three newcomers regarding all my acquaintances, and at various time regarding themes suggested by Stepanov's inventions. While I am no longer accused of personal espionage, divers other citizens are assumed to be spies, and it is indicated that I should have been aware of that fact. Stepanov's alleged espionage is not mentioned further, but attention is centred upon various of my acquaintances, both Russian and foreign. I am pressed for statements likely to implicate them, and meanwhile hints are thrown out regarding my fate, my brother's, and my youthful son's. There are plain suggestions that in case of my refusal to sign a statement, we are all likely to be shot; and, on the other hand, promises of concealment of my name guaranteed in the event of confession, considering the invaluable nature of the testimony to be obtained from me from 'an international point of view', and considering 'the diplomatic nature of the case'.

Hours pass—investigators come and go, so that I can scarcely remember their faces. I am seated in an arm-chair at a desk, with a bright light thrown on me, and Dobrotin opposite. The other investigators are seated in shadow on a divan across the room.

Since I am speaking the strict truth I am not likely to contradict myself. Nevertheless, the long-drawn-out investigation is beginning to play on my nerves, and make me feel both apathetic and indifferent. I feel that it is imperative to bring matters to a close.

"I don't understand why you jeopardise your own safety to protect others who would never protect you",

says the man with the stripes. "You are, after all, not even accused of active espionage."

Determined to put an end to all this, I reply calmly and firmly: "I am a journalist well-informed in Soviet affairs—not a boy nor a coward. I cherish no illusions regarding the fate of my relatives or myself, nor do I believe for a moment the promises of the G.P.U. I consider all these charges to be nonsense, and I am confident you comrades are of the same opinion, since no intelligent man could see them in any other light. All this considered, I will say no more, nor will I sign any further statements."

At this, one of the investigators leaps to his feet and screams: "What do you mean, you won't?"—and sits down again. The man with the stripes lights a cigarette and remarks: "You, yourself, Ivan Lukianovich, have with your last remark signed your own sentence. You have refused the chance we tried to give you of saving yourself, but that is, after all, your affair. You may go."

I rise and move towards the guard at the door. "You can inform your investigator, should you change your mind—if it does not prove to be too late," says the man with the stripes.

"I shall never change my mind!"

I returned to my cell feeling weak and unnerved. I felt that all I valued most had been taken from me: my mind full of darkness and despair. Had I, in reality, endangered anyone? Naturally I knew nothing of possible arrests in Moscow, or by what devious methods the alleged material for this elaborate fiction had been compiled. My reason, my experience firmly reassured me of the correctness of my attitude. But a dark fear rose from my heart, and once more I saw a vision of my son's curly head bullet-smitten.

I pulled my blanket over my head to conceal my panic from possible observers at the grating in the door. The door clanged open and two guards rushed in and pulled off my blanket. I could not guess what they wanted, unless to prevent that easy and certain method of suicide by means of a tightly twisted string around one's neck, compressing the carotid artery. I said to the guards: "The light disturbs me."

"That doesn't matter—you are not allowed to cover your head."

They went away but the little peephole in the door still creaked intermittently throughout the long night.

### *The Sentence*

There followed then days of waiting. Somewhere in the hopper of the gigantic, pitiless G.P.U. machine there were papers marked 'Case No. 2248'. The machine will deliver it to the conveyor belt. It will presently reach its destination and—a guard will come to my cell and say: "Gather up your things."

Perhaps two or three men will come—surely at night. They will have revolvers in their hands, like Dobrotin's Colt.

Infinite darkness and sleepless nights, illuminated only by the one dim light on the ceiling of my cell! Dead silence in the division of solitary confinement, with the occasional discord of a scream. Cut off from the outer world, I felt buried alive. So passed three months.

Finally, one day, at six o'clock in the morning, a guard enters with papers. "Your name?"

"Solonevich, Ivan Lukianovich."

"Extract from the protocol of the *Special Judicial Troika*, PP., O.G.P.U., L.V.O., of November 18, 1933.

My brain remains clear, though my heart sinks. It is not shooting, at any rate—the guard is alone and unarmed.

*Subject*

Case No. 2248, regarding citizen Solonevich, Ivan Lukianovich, accused of crimes covered by paragraphs 58-6, 58-10, 58-11, and 59-10.

*Resolution*

The Troika finds citizen Solonevich, Ivan Lukianovich, guilty of all the crimes mentioned in said paragraphs, and sentences him to confinement in a labour Camp for the term of eight years.

“Sign it,” said the guard, placing the paper before me. I refused to sign unless given the opportunity to read the document, note the number, date, etc. The guard consented.

Later I learned that this method of communicating a verdict was customary. In most cases, and especially with the unfortunate peasants, the accused are transported without notice to a Concentration Camp, and are unable, through ignorance of the number or date of their case, to draw up any appeal or obtain legal assistance.

Eight years in Concentration Camp! Eight years as a galley slave! . . . nevertheless, it is better than death. I felt reprieved. Yet a whole series of questions confronted me. Why only eight and not ten years? What had become of Yura, Boris, Irene, Stepanov? And, finally, will our next attempt to escape succeed? For after all, if Soviet ‘Liberty’ proved intolerable, what will a Soviet ‘galley’ prove?

Perhaps the relative lightness of the sentence may have been due to my failing to incriminate anyone, signing no denunciations, inventing no fictions. Perhaps my life was spared for want of a ‘grand affair’ of G.P.U. con-

struction, or simply in the joy of the contemporary recognition of the Soviets by the United States. Who knows why?

Boris will probably have received a similar sentence. Considering his lesser guilt, Yura may have escaped with simple deportation to some distant place; yet his behaviour towards the investigators had been bad, and he had refused to sign any statements. Dobrotin had even complained to me of Yura. I can form no opinion about Stepanov—his mendacities might prove very damaging.

This same day I was removed to the 'Deportation Prison' in Nizhegorodskaya Street.

### *In Nizhegorodskaya Street*

To-day is the 'grand reception' day at the Deportation Prison. Hundreds of peasants and others crowd the great stone corridors. Some are from the provincial prisons, some from the 'Shpalerka' (the G.P.U. prison on Shpalernaya Street); many of these are industrial workers and Urks (criminals). To my astonishment, there are very few representatives of the Intelligentsia. I recognise Yura at a distance, he holds up three fingers to indicate the term of his sentence. He is so haggard, his hair so dishevelled, I can scarcely recognise him. He had been on hunger strike as a protest against the food. Boris, his emaciated face heavily bearded, is here also. He is trying to arrange so that we three can share a cell. His sentence is the same as mine, but that scarcely interests us at the moment; the principal thing is that our lives have been spared, and for this we are thankful to God!

After some manœuvring on the part of Boris, we found ourselves, a few hours later, together in a cell—a small cell, dry and well lighted, and with no other occu-

pants. We embraced each other affectionately, exchanged experiences, and at once began forming new schemes for escape.

All three together, and out of danger for the moment, we are comparatively content. It is like the sensation of recovery from a severe illness; one feels returning strength, and the world seems brighter and better than before. A small library, not, however, well chosen, was at our disposal. Each day we were allowed exercise. At first, however, our legs bent under our weight from weakness. There was more liberty and less surveillance in this prison than in Shpalerka, in consequence of which we were able to restore communication with the outside world and receive parcels of food which helped to recruit our strength.

Boris suggested that we should practice running a distance of some miles daily. We were taken for walks in small groups and in fixed formation, so that we had to mark time when running. The guard watched us suspiciously at first, but when we told him that Boris was champion of Russia, he good-naturedly allowed us to run in the empty yard after our daily exercise had ended. In this way, we managed to gain a greater degree of physical fitness, so that we were better able to withstand many of the hardships of the Camp when we entered it. Incidentally, all our prison mates as well as the officials took a real interest in our athletic activities, and enjoyed watching us at our exercises.

### *A Prison in the Socialist Paradise*

In the Deportation Prison it was possible to form an idea of the social standing of its occupants, which had been impossible in Shpalerka. This was a peasants' and

workers' prison in every sense. During the whole month of our incarceration we were, to our surprise, the only representatives of the Intelligentsia.

The peasants were particularly dejected in appearance, and were suffering from starvation. When one met them alone one would usually hear a choked whisper: "Brother, could you spare just a little piece of bread—a crust, eh?"

The factory workers, of whom there were many, were better dressed and less famished. In addition, there were a number of gloomy, desperate, and helpless 'eminent foreigners'. These were principally Finnish workers who had come by devious ways, mostly illegal, to the land of Socialism. The 'country of all workers' did not want them, since it scarcely knew what to do with its own workers. Nor was it advisable to return them to their own country after they had seen the general pauperism, famine, and innumerable firing squads. Meanwhile, they languished for months in jail, friendless, without knowledge of the Russian language, with ample time to regret the freedom, by contrast, of their unproletarian homeland.

All these pitiful immigrants had been enticed hither by Communist propaganda, picturing the delights of the Socialist paradise, so much talked of during the commencement of the 'Five-Year Plan', while the future still seemed rosy. It had been expected that the tremendous growth of industry under the Plan would require an increase in skilled labour. As the second 'Five-Year Plan' proceeded, it soon appeared, on the contrary, that there was an actual surplus of Russian labour which could not be utilised. The threat of unemployment on a gigantic scale impended; meanwhile, the 'welfare of the masses' appeared ever more distant. The Soviet Government,



unable to pay and feed the considerable number of foreign specialists under contract, found it increasingly necessary to get rid of them. No trouble was taken, meanwhile, to end Communist propaganda abroad; with the consequence that thousands of immigrant idealists continued to arrive, legally and illegally, only to fall into the lion's jaws of the G.P.U.

Whether or not one sympathises with such idealism, the fate of these poor foreigners excites compassion. They had fled from the 'sharks of the bourgeoisie' to their Socialist comrades. The first thing these comrades did was to fling them into the cellars of the G.P.U.

In the village of Koikora, in Karelia, a convoy of these dreamers whose like I had met previously in various places, had been transported to a prison by the G.P.U. I had come there to spy out the land, in preparation for our intended escape from the Socialist paradise, to which they had unfortunately journeyed. They were stunned, lost, hungry; they had seen little, but that little seemed to augur nothing good. They spoke no Russian: their convoy no other language. I volunteered to serve as interpreter, and translated under the immediate supervision of the Chekists. I had to speak slowly and distinctly, since the Finn and the Jew to whom I was speaking and who alone understood German, could understand very little. Even so, my conduct was dangerous, since an unwary word might mean a Concentration Camp for me also. The Finns knew that the Karelians understood Finnish, but none of the frightened peasants were permitted to approach the prisoners. When I asked the commander of the convoy an obvious question, I got the retort: "None of their business."

The Finn inquired as to where they were being taken

and was told that "he would see for himself". He asked, naïvely, if they could get some bread and lard, and elicited only laughter in reply. At a loss as to further questions, the Finn asked me, "Is it possible, after all, that the bourgeois newspapers are telling the truth?"

I replied, with the words of the convoy commander, "You will see for yourself." I never met any of these immigrants in the Concentration Camps. I learned later that they were transported to Siberia, to prevent any attempt to return to their old non-Socialist homes.

### *Entrance and Exit*

An unshaven individual, laden with sacks of all kinds, was pushed through the door of our cell. He immediately threw the sacks on the floor and growled fiercely at the guard: "Where in the name of your accursed mother are you pushing me, devil's child? There is no room here to sit or stand." The door closed, without reply.

"Sons of bitches," he remarked to the closed door. My doubts as to his identity completely vanished.

"Josef Antonovich, in the flesh!" I exclaimed. "Never mind, we will arrange it somehow." He had been preparing to kick the door, but stopped in astonishment at my voice.

"May the devil take me—is that you, Ivan Lukianovich? And Boris? And, you, I suppose, are Yura?" (Josef had not seen Yura for fifteen years.) "Let us embrace," he said, clasping us in the old Russian manner, despite our bristling faces.

"How do you happen to be here?" I asked.

"What a damned stupid question! In the usual way, of course, and thanks to you, devil take you! But I will tell you all that later. The principal thing is that you are all

alive, and to hell with the rest of it. I have a whole sackful of grub and cigarettes here, so pile in and eat, you bounders."

"No, tell us your story first, Josef Antonovich; in the meantime we will eat, and tell you our story later." We started eating, while Josef Antonovich, lighting a cigarette and walking up and down the cell, began:

"I had quarrelled and broken off with my bosses in Leningrad. The sons of bitches had stolen hospital linen, and wanted me to cover up the theft in the book-keeping. I spat on their ugly mugs, gathered up my duds and pots, and moved to Murmansk. It's a hell of a lousy place, but the responsible employees there get the 'Arctic ration' (double the usual allowance, besides butter, lard, cheese, sausage, chocolate, etc)., and a fellow can exist. Besides, there are sea bass in the gulf, a wonderful fish! I even began to think about skating (he had been a first-class skater). In a word, I was living and working like the devil when—'boomps'. While I was sitting home one evening, drinking vodka with my supper, they appeared! 'Will you allow us,' they said, 'to make a search?' Ah, you bitches' puppies, thought I, trying to be European with your 'allow me'. But it did not make a damned bit of difference . . . they would find nothing in my house except empty vodka bottles. 'Allow me,' said I, 'to finish my vodka while you make your search.' In a word, they rummaged through everything, while I finished my vodka, and then took me to the G.P.U. from which, with an escort of two idiots, I was sent to Leningrad. As I had money, we boozed during the entire journey. I pumped so much vodka into the nitwits that, on arriving at the Nicholas Station, we stank so that everyone around us turned up their noses. With such a jag, it would not do to put in an appearance at the G.P.U. headquarters,

so we staggered to the market, where we chewed a lot of garlic, and I telephoned my sister."

"Why didn't you escape?" asked Yura, naïvely.

"And why the devil should I escape? Where to? What had I done to induce me to escape? The only thing I had done was to drink vodka; but one is not jugged for that reason. On the contrary, it makes revenue for the State, and besides, drunken men do not meddle with politics. Finally, we dragged ourselves to 'Shpalerka' and I was put in 'solitary'. I understood nothing. I just sat and waited. After a few days, I was called up for examination. Some fat, bloody bastard received me!"

"Dobrotin?"

"Devil knows. Perhaps it was Dobrotin. He began, as usual, 'We know everything about you.' 'Very agreeable that you know,' I said. 'Then tell me, please, why the devil I am jugged?' 'You are accused of forming a counter-revolutionary society. Such and such persons have been at your house and had such and such conversations.' I am bewildered, and do not understand a thing. One drinks vodka everywhere and talks like this everywhere. If everyone were jugged for this kind of conversation, there would be no one out of the jug in Leningrad. 'And, besides, you are charged with being an accomplice of your friend, Solonevich, in his attempt to escape.' From this I learned that you, also, poor devil, had fallen into the lion's den, but what has that to do with me? The fat bastard insists on my signing statements about you and about others. I tell him I will sign nothing, that I had no counter-revolutionary meetings at my house, and that it was not my job to hang on to your coat-tails to prevent your escape. The son of a bitch began cursing me with all kinds of filthy words, and stuck his revolver under my nose,

"Ah, you son of a bitch," I think, "for seventeen years I have lived under Soviet rule, and you still try to frighten me with shooting. You know me, and you know that I am always polite, so I told him he could poke his revolver under his wife's nose, if he liked, and if he did not put it away, I would poke my fist through his damned meat grinders. He took my advice, otherwise I might have hurt him."

"After two months, I was called up again and told, if you please, three years' deportation to Siberia! Nothing one can do about it—if it is Siberia—then Siberia! Devil take them. There is vodka also in Siberia, and I can get drunk there the same as any other gentleman. But, for God's sake, Ivan Lukianovich, you are no fool—tell me how you could swallow the bait of these idiots?"

Josef Antonovich is completely sceptical as to any talent in the G.P.U. "With all their money and opportunities, why would they need brains in the G.P.U.? With nearly twenty-five per cent of the population of Leningrad directly or indirectly serving them as spies, they have to succeed. I have just learned that, once for all, you need never fear the G.P.U. They make arrests just to seem formidable, but it is no trick for a clever man to fool them. Now tell me what is wrong with all of you?"

While I tell him our story, indignation and disgust become more and more evident in his countenance.

"Babenko! That son of a bitch who drank at my table for three years! I would never believe him under oath. E. is just a silly fool but she never believes it, no matter how often I tell her. She always sees herself as a Metternich in petticoats. So she also got three years in Siberia! Do you think she will be any wiser after that? Impossible! I have told you before, Ivan Lukianovich, to have

nothing to do with women in such matters. But to hell with all this. The principal thing is that you are all alive, so do not lose courage. Do you intend to escape now?"

"We certainly do."

"Abroad?"

"You can bet your life, abroad! If not, where else?"

"But why in the devil's name have they deported me? It can't be just for counter-revolutionary babbling over one's vodka."

"Probably for the way you talked to the investigators."

"Perhaps. But do you expect me to allow the dirty bastard to flourish a revolver in my face?"

"Seriously, Josef Antonovich, would you have smashed his face?" asked Yura.

Josef Antonovich bristles. "And what else do you think there would have been for me to do?"

Like a sinewy old draft-horse, Josef Antonovich, despite his long-standing addiction to strong liquor, had retained his strength, and was certainly still capable of smashing a man's face at will. And you could depend on his doing it if he felt in the mood. For the matter of that, all over Russia, and especially in Leningrad, where it is difficult to get anything except vodka, most of the population pour liquor down their throats, when they get the chance, and are usually drunk in consequence. As far as that goes, it's the same thing in any part of the world where poverty is deep and prospects poor.

"The devil take it," continues Josef Antonovich. "If I must go to Siberia, I must go. Living there won't be any worse than in other places."

"At least," said Boris, "you will drink less there."

"On the contrary, what else is there for an honest man to do? Do you expect me to steal or to lick the soles of

Stalin's feet, or to bow down to every bastard I come across? I would rather go on drinking honestly, like a gentleman. That way, I will live perhaps another five years, and then—finish! Understand me, Boris Lukianovich, there is no such thing as life here; if I were still thirty years of age, it might be different, but I am fifty. Would you have me provide myself with a family and manufacture flesh for Stalin's experiments? No, it is better to sit down with a bottle when you come home, and if you tip it often enough you forget everything, and do not notice the chaos around you. If I could escape with you, what could I do there? No, Boris Lukianovich, the simplest way out is by means of the bottle."

Of all possibilities of oblivion in Russia, the most popular is inebriation. Maybe there is not enough bread to go round, but one can always find vodka. A bottle of vodka costs no more than four pounds of bread, and you do not have to stand in a line to buy it. Everyone drinks everywhere. Youths and girls drink, so does everyone, save the peasants, who haven't the money.

Despite the array of statistics on every imaginable subject in the U.S.S.R., there are none on alcoholism. People drink more *per capita* in Leningrad than anywhere else in the world, especially the middle Intelligentsia and the youthful workers. People are driven to it by forced social activities, compulsory enthusiasm, the labour of galley slaves, absence of prospects, ceaseless oppression, and grief over the conditions of Soviet existence. Vodka drinking is a general custom and it is distinctly characteristic of the most valuable elements in the population.

A few days later a guard called for Josef Antonovich.

"I will go nowhere," declared Josef, "I have an appointment to-day. Someone is coming to see me."

"What have I to do with your appointments? You must come with me to the Étape, so gather up your things."

"Gather them up yourself! If I do go with you, I will first have to get some equipment. I can't go to Siberia in the winter with these shoes."

"I know nothing about that. I tell you once more, collect your things, otherwise you'll be taken by force."

"Go to hell," said Antonovich emphatically.

The guard disappeared, and returned a few moments later with a companion of higher rank.

"How dare you defy the rules," bawls the new official.

"Now, there is no need to scream." With a gesture of an experienced skater Antonovich lifted a foot, with its old torn shoe, directly under the official's nose. "Now the devil, you can see for yourself that I can't go to Siberia without soles on my shoes."

"I spit on your soles; get your things at once, and come along!"

Antonovich sat down on the bed and remarked threateningly: "Go back to the devil's mother that sent you, and ask her to send someone of more intelligence."

The official stood for a moment undecided, and then departed with a threat: "We will take you in hand immediately!"

"You know, Josef Antonovich," said I, "you are likely to get into trouble through this."

"To hell with them! These bastards want to send me somewhere—to the devil's mother, maybe, for no reason, and you expect me to be polite to them for doing it. Let them go on trying, and I will smash some of their mugs!"

A half-hour later, a guard arrived and said, "Citizen P., you are going to the reception room." Josef Antonovich departed, fully equipped, for Siberia.



*Prison Trains*

Every week two trains are run from the Leningrad prisons to the Concentration Camps. With the prison frequently overcrowded, there is very often a considerable interval before deportation. We spend more than a month in anticipation. Finally our turn comes.

The Camp candidates are drawn up in long lines in the dimly-lit corridors. Everyone must strip and then stand naked for an indefinite time on the cold stone floor, freezing further and further, during an interminable and ridiculous search of the discarded clothing. Clad once more, we are seated in trucks, surrounded by soldiers. Warning is given us that at any attempt to escape we shall be shot without notice. The jail gates are thrown open, disclosing a crowd of some five hundred people, mostly women, awaiting us.

The mass of people make way for the trucks, while the air is filled with shrieks, greetings, and farewells. We hear a confused wail of human agony in which no separate voices or utterances are distinguishable. The majority of the crowd are Russian women, starving and exhausted, who have come for a last look at their husbands, brothers, or sons. Each man who falls into the cogs of the G.P.U. machine leaves behind a legacy of women's sorrow, sleepless nights, and pitiful deprivation.

All these women have been haunting the prison gates for weeks to learn the deportation date of their nearest and dearest. This is a cold January day, and I know they have been waiting since dawn. Loading of the trucks begins at daybreak and lasts all day—about forty truck loads of prisoners are despatched to-day. While these poor women stand in the bitter cold all day for the sake of a possible farewell glimpse of the face of someone they

love, even this poor solace is likely to be denied them, since all of us are sitting on the floor of the trucks, hidden by the long coats of the soldiers surrounding us.

How many scores, hundreds, thousands of mothers, wives, sisters, are standing in almost endless lines, beating against jail doors in order to send parcels to their loved ones—parcels provided at the cost of the most cruel sacrifice and deprivation—even to the last crust of bread.

A truck moves slowly up. The crowd closes in around it, almost falling under the wheels. Its speed increases. The women run close alongside, crying out different names. A girl, with tear-stained face and dishevelled hair flying in the wind, runs along abreast of the machine, staggering as if drunk, barely escaping death under the wheels, crying: "Misha, my dear Misha!" A Chekist foot over the side kicks her away. She falls, and is lost in the crowd.

The soldiers threaten the crowd and the prisoners with their *nagans*, bawling out: "Keep still! Do not get up! Sit down—or we will shoot!"

Fortunately, there is no one to see us off. Happily also this Misha is not with us. The engines roar. The crowd stands aside. All other movement on the street is stopped by the tragic procession of trucks.

At last we reach the back yard of the Nicholas Railway Station, already prepared for Chekist unloading operations by a barbed-wire enclosure, with machine guns at each corner. Drawn up by the platform, we find a long freight train; this is our transport train, waiting to take us God knows where, and for God knows how long!

During these periodic loading operations there is a continuous accompaniment of scolding, cursing, and general hurly-burly. We are driven from one car to

another like cattle. Every car is filled to overflowing, even by G.P.U. standards. The soldiers bawl and scream, the Urks scold, the peasants groan. At last we find an almost empty car, and immediately a wild and furious crowd bursts in on top of us.

The cars have three rows of shelves for sleeping, about forty-four inches wide, one above the other, running all around the interior, and are officially estimated to accommodate forty people. Generally, sixty to seventy are crowded in—we had fifty-eight. No one knows our destination. We understand it is somewhere beyond the Urals, in which case we must anticipate a month or two *en route*. Under these conditions the spaces on the shelves, which are not, of course, sufficient to accommodate everybody, become the cause of furious fighting. The doors are slammed, and we find ourselves in semi-darkness. On the right the doors are tightly nailed; on the left we have grated iron doors, like animal cages, protected by a wooden inside door. In the dim light the whole car seems filled, from floor to ceiling, with screaming and swearing people and their belongings. To the accompaniment of volleys of profanity, rattle of tin tea kettles, and the crash of falling bodies, there is a general *mêlée* in the attempt to obtain places on the shelves. The upper shelves, being lighter, warmer, and cleaner, are the coveted prizes. We manage to capture places on the middle shelf. These are not so good as those at the top, but better than the lower ones, and are far better than remaining on the floor in the middle of the car.

The disorder lasts for perhaps an hour. Meanwhile tiny beams of light penetrate the numerous holes in the ceiling, and through them also the January wind sends

small streams of snow which gather in little patches on the floor. The mere thought of the wind blowing in when we are moving makes one shiver. The only prospect of warmth is from a small cast-iron stove, dating from God knows when, and nearly ruined with rust, which stands in the middle of the floor. We remain side-tracked in the station for almost twenty hours, during which time we receive neither food nor water nor any wood for the stove. The occupants of the car have calmed down from sheer hunger and fatigue.

Night falls. We hear the clanging of buffers; we are starting at last.

We lie close to each other on the shelves, with no room to turn, since men are packed together as tightly as sardines. I feel the cold penetrating my whole body, my feet and legs stiffen; my brain seems to freeze. Yura is shivering all over, and despite all his efforts he trembles continuously.

"Are you freezing, Yura?"

"No, Dad, it is nothing."

So the night passes.

Next day at noon at a station we get a little green wood for the stove, which fills the waggon with unpleasant smoke and gives little heat. But the strain is slightly relieved, and I begin to observe our new comrades.

Most of them are peasants, dressed in higgledy-piggledy fashion, just as they were when arrested. No one stands on ceremony with these poor devils. They are arrested while working in the fields, and thrown at once into some horrible provincial jail, not even comparable to the 'Shpalerka' prison! In these filthy holes a single solitary confinement cell may serve to accommodate ten

to provide them with a strengthening and nourishing diet before they commence work, their stomachs are so constricted from starvation that they cannot digest the food. To-day it is necessary to put them in quarantine for two weeks after arrival in Camps, in order to accustom them to food and work conditions. These millions of peasants, deprived of all rights, are poorer than the slaves in Africa, with no prospects and no possible escape from their misery save death.

### *The Clan of Urks*

In our car our friend Stepanov, an engineer from Leningrad, and we three all gathered together on the middle shelf, were the only representatives of the Intelligentsia. The upper shelves were mostly occupied by workmen from Leningrad.

The Urks (criminals) sat in a crowded mass around the stove. Their clothing could scarcely be called even rags; they were nearly naked. The almost incredible physical endurance of these formerly homeless youths was the only explanation of their survival. Those unable to endure riding under railway cars, spending their nights in coal piles, and feeding in Soviet garbage-pits had died. There remained, as a result of the most cruel natural selection, only the strongest, with the endurance of animals and with a bestial hatred towards the world which had condemned them to this ghastly struggle for existence.

As the warmth of the stove gradually reached us, I began to nod. I was aroused by a wild scream, to see the engineer leaning against the side of the car, quite pale, holding by one end a bag, the other end of which was clutched by a youth whose eyes were like those of a pole-

cat caught in a trap. Boris was already trying to help the engineer. Evidently the Urk was attempting to steal the bag, relying on the help of his pals. Boris was talking rapidly in an attempt to restore order, but it was impossible to hear him in the general medley of foul language. Firewood, fists, and knives hurtled in the air.

Yura and I, going to the assistance of Boris, constituted with his help something to be reckoned with, even by the entire gang of Urks. However, the young Urk continued to grasp the bag with a desperate tenacity, until an authoritative voice pronounced calmly: "Let go the bag." The bag was at once released. The calm voice continued: "We shall take the bag and you will not even know about it."

I looked around. A tall, lean Urk, evidently the ring-leader who had, by his appearance, taken a number of terrible beatings, said to Boris: "Why the hell are you interfering? So long as it is not your bag, it is none of your damned business. If you butt in, you may get a knife in your bloody ribs some night. There are always knives, you know. No search can find them."

In what way the Urks contrive to smuggle their knives into the prisons and to hide them from all searchers, God only knows. I realised how easy it would be to get stabbed in such a crowd at any time.

The workers on the upper shelves knew from experience what it meant to interfere with Urks and remained strictly neutral. The peasants murmured timidly in their corner. We were only four, Stepanov being of no account, against some fifteen Urks; and were really no safer from these convicts than if we had been cast on a desert island. The only law, represented by the Commander of the convoy, was in force outside the car; his

interest was confined to preventing escape or in minimising the number of deaths. As to an ordinary murder, who would trouble about it?

Boris turned to the leader: "There are three of us—myself, my brother, and his son. If any of us is stabbed, you will be held responsible."

The Urk burst into insolent laughter. "Ho, ho, ho!—to be held responsible! . . . Maybe to Stalin himself. Well, comrade, perhaps we will cut your guts out first!"

All the Urks joined in the laughter; and it was clear that any reliance on talk of law and responsibility was useless, and that the Urks knew this better than ourselves. The leader, laughing, made a vulgar gesture with his dirty finger before Boris's face.

Boris caught his hand as quickly as lightning, and held it as firmly as in a vice. The Urk's laughter became a scream; he tried to break away. Some of the other Urks rushed to his assistance, but Yura and I stepped in between.

"Let go," groaned the leader, "I surrender." Boris released his hand. The Urk writhed in pain and looked at Boris with eyes of agony, anger, and respect.

"Well, comrade, what is your name?" I said in the calmest manner.

"My name is none of your God damn business," he replied.

"Mikhailov is his name," someone was heard to say.

"Well, when my brother spoke about responsibility, comrade Mikhailov," I continued indifferently, "he did not mean what you thought, at all. Just remember that if anyone of us gets hurt, the rest of us will break *all* your necks. We will make a thorough job of it, too; and it will be your neck first, comrade Mikhailov."

The Urk was silent. The experience he had just had with Boris convinced him that my threat was no empty one. The rest of the gang were silent also.

But for our united stand the Urks would have robbed us of everything. It happens continually in the prison cells, in the Étape and in the Concentration Camps. The Urks have organisation, while the prisoners are just a disunited mass. A similar organisation for purposes of robbery and assault on everyone exists outside the Camps; with the only difference that it operates on a much larger scale throughout all Russia.

*The Hard-boiled Ego of an Urk*

Presently Mikhailov approached me once more: "What a bull that brother of yours is—he almost broke my hand, I can hardly move it even now. Give me your cigarette stub, comrade Solonevich. I am just starving for a smoke."

I accepted the olive branch and offered my makhorka pouch. The Urk rolled a cigarette from a piece of newspaper and inhaled with rapture.

"Ours is really a dog's life, Comrade Solonevich."

"Why don't you change, then?"

"How? We are just a lost brotherhood, torn from our mother's breasts and thrown into the army of the homeless. I myself became a thief as a little boy, and I will remain a thief until I die. But as for that damned sissy of an engineer of yours, we will get him yet, if not here, then in Camp. The son of a bitch, the bloody scoundrel! He has got at least forty pounds of bread with him. We only asked him politely for a slice, but the dirty dog cursed us and refused."

An imposing bass sounded from the workmen's shelf:



"Only that remains to be done—to feed you damned lousy scoundrels!"

The Urk raised his head: "You will feed us willy-nilly. Do you think we are less hungry than you?"

"I don't beg from anybody."

"Neither do I. I just take what I want."

"That is why you are sitting where you are."

"Well, where are you sitting, in your home with your woman?"

Another voice from the shelf succeeded the original bass: "They want to be fed after stealing the workman's last shirt—the present sentences are too short for these beasts!"

"You are bloody well right about our terms being short. You get ten years maybe, while I get only three. You had to work very hard formerly to get your two pounds of bread a day from the Soviets; you will have to work much harder in camp for the same two pounds, till you finally die and go to meet the devil's mother."

"We shall see who will die first."

"You will," said the Urk with conviction. "As soon as spring comes, I will disappear like a needle in a haystack. With you it is different; where in hell can you go? No, you will perish soon enough."

The Urk's last argument had crushed the workers' shelf into silence. The engineer retorted crisply: "We ought to crack the skulls of such beasts!"

The Urk's face was disfigured with a flush of contemptuous anger. "You, with a mouth like a spittoon, do you think it will be you who will break my head? You had better look out, you son of a bitch. You stick out your chin when we address you politely, but after we get to Camp you will be crawling on your belly before us.

There, nevertheless, we will cut your guts out in two seconds. You will find no one in Camp behind whose skirts you can hide. This fellow," the Urk nodded in my direction, "could break someone's head, but you, you stinking lousy rabbit . . . !"

Stepanov took up the tale. He had already been robbed by the Urks in the Deportation prison and foresaw more trouble of the same kind. His hands trembled with fear and rage and he fairly spluttered in his speech: "The Soviets ought to shoot such devils on the spot. They steal and they rob everywhere. It is complete tyranny to put us in the same car with such dogs—I don't see how it is possible."

The Urk looked at him contemptuously: "You had better rest quietly in your place, my sweet mister, and write confessions for the G.P.U. Sit still and be thankful that you are let alone. You can rely on our taking your watch which you got in jail soon enough."

Stepanov clutched his pocket convulsively while the Urk roared with laughter.

"He is one of our crowd," said I, "leave him alone."

"All right, boss, it makes no difference—we or someone else—here or in Camp. He is just a dirty rat, this friend of yours. Some of our fellows here were in the same cell with him, and he was always writing confessions."

Stepanov when panic-stricken was ever ready to make a complete fool of himself: "It is none of your business what I was writing. I will lodge a complaint against you."

"Listen to me, you silly ass. Up to now I have stolen nothing from you, but if you do complain, who will help you?"

"Once we are in camp, the G.P.U. will take charge of you," said the engineer.

"It is clear enough that your mother slept with fools or you would never be so clever! What do you know about the Camp? Have you ever been there? This is the fifth time I have been sent up, yet you want to tell me about Camps!"

"What it is like in Camp?" I asked.

"In Camp it depends on who the prisoner is. Both you and the engineer are bourgeois, so you will be labelled 'counter-revolutionaries'; the blockheads on the upper shelves will be accused of sabotage or counter-revolutionary activities; the peasant is always a kulak. But whatever you are, you are enemies of the working class, and will be treated accordingly. On the other hand, we Urks may be thieves, but we are not class enemies. We are a social element akin to the Bolsheviks, because we are against property."

"Including Socialist property?"

"No, we never touch State property. It is not worth while. If you steal a cent's worth you have to pay a dollar and you are beaten by the police into the bargain. It is simpler to look for a jackass like the engineer, and pick his pockets. It is as easy as blowing your nose! Can he make a complaint? That is nothing to worry about. The police are easy to bargain with. It is simple enough in Concentration Camp. If we tell somebody to take off his coat, he just does it to save himself from getting hurt with a knife."

Although the Urk was bragging, he was not far from the truth. It would be bad for Stepanov without our courage, skill, resources, and powerful fists.

### *Urks—Not Men*

There are many things in Soviet Russia as to which no

information is obtainable. The Press is forbidden to print news of murders or any other crimes, which have been so common as to attract little attention. The phenomena of social hygiene, prostitution, alcoholism, suicide, and the problem of the 'homeless children' belong to this class. These children had, to all appearances, disappeared from the main lines of travel; yet it was known that 'liquidation' of the kulaks, civil war, and epidemics, famine and collectivisation had actually increased the number sharply. What had become of them? Evidently they lurked somewhere in the rear of the Socialist front. It was not until our transportation to the Concentration Camp that I fully realised the nature of the transition that had taken place. The abandoned children had, quite naturally, evolved as they grew into Urks.

The present representative of this world of professional bandits sat with me and smoked my makhorka, clad only in a pair of ragged trousers and a torn coat. The coat, originally of fashionable cut and material, completely failed to conceal the absence of the shirt which Mikhailov had swapped for drinks while in jail. Though an icy January wind blew on our backs, while the stove blazed in our faces, the Urk was equally indifferent to both heat and cold. He suggested the oft-told tale of one of these vagabonds being taken into a crematorium—the door being left open. From beside the burning pitch, the boy was heard to shout: "Shut the door, you fool. There's a draught."

Presently, half a score of ragged Urks lay on the frozen floor, indifferent to the breezes blowing up through holes and cracks, and while smoking my makhorka and replenishing the stove with firewood, they obliged me with much information regarding the Camp. Their speech

was thickly sprinkled with unprintable obscenity and they consumed fully ten roubles' worth of my makhorka; nevertheless, I felt that I had never invested money to greater advantage. Before me there unrolled itself an educational film of life in a Concentration Camp, with its cruelty, swindling robberies, murders, and life in solitary confinement, all revealed at last. I listened to endless tales of crime in thieves' jargon, plentifully larded with obscenities. During all this time the peasants and workers were asleep and snoring lustily. Here is a typical narrative, told by an Urk of about seventeen.

"One New Year's Eve in Kiev a funny thing happened to me. I cracked the cheap lock of an apartment and entered a small room, in which I noticed on the sofa a bundle covered by a coat. It seemed to be a good bourgeois coat, and as there was no time to take anything else I just grabbed the coat and bundle and ran. Then I felt something move in the bundle. Looking inside, I saw a baby! The little bastard had slept all the time. I looked around and there was nobody in sight. So I put on the coat, and threw the baby into the snow under the bushes."

"But what happened to the baby?"

The question evidently struck the Urk as being naïve; he answered indifferently: "How the hell should I know? He wasn't mine," and he closed with a particularly obscene oath, while the rest of the gang roared with laughter.

And such was this liquidated homelessness, this army 'operating in the rear of the Socialist frontier'. Aside from the solidarity of a wolf pack, the Urk showed no traceable human emotion nor any sympathy with society. Probably no other age or country has ever harboured a criminal class of such incredible depravity, completely

estranged from society and with a total number of at least a million. In the White Sea-Baltic Combine, the Urks constituted some fifteen per cent of the group. What the percentage in other camps may be is problematical. Other questions naturally arise. How many Urks are there outside the Camps in the U.S.S.R.? My answer is, "I don't know."

A further question is: "What is to be done with these people in the Russia of the future?" and my reply is necessarily the same. "I don't know."

*'Nor any Drop to Drink'*

Soviet Russia is crammed full of cruelty, some of it inherent in the development of a classless society, some of it casual and haphazard. The general and impenetrable chaos pervading the Soviet system is responsible for much. A planned economy, impossible of fulfilment in practice, necessarily creates irresponsibility and disorder, which require punishment. An enormous number of penalties are chargeable to culpable negligence; perhaps, a far greater number to the practical impossibility of compliance with a limitless series of instructions.

In these circumstances problems of importance remain untabulated, and predictions of any degree of accuracy as to the future remain impossible. The actual area planted with grain, as a conspicuous instance, is, I am convinced, unknown to His Majesty Stalin, the Politburo, the Central Bureau of Statistics, and everyone else; the reason being that information becomes so completely muddled in passing through thousands of hands on its way to the top that it loses all value.

In Camp one quickly realises that the resulting chaos costs countless human lives. Take nutrition, for example.

Everyone in Camp was supposed to receive daily one and one-half pounds of bread and a specified quantity of pickled herring, a cube of sugar, and boiling water. At the commencement of our journey to Camp our ration of bread and herring for five days was distributed in advance, but no sugar or water was provided. This shortage continued for forty-eight hours, despite a diet largely composed of salt herring. The first day was hard enough; the second day was unendurable. We thrust our hands through the grating of the door, gathering a little snow from the roof and also consumed whatever drifts had come in through the walls and floor. The horrors of thirst in the heat and sand of the desert, or of the sun in the Pacific, can hardly compare with the state produced by forty-eight hours' restriction to salt herring, without a drop of water. On the third day, at dawn, when our train stopped at an obscure station, someone was heard to say: "Water is being distributed."

The fifty-eight men in the car precipitated themselves simultaneously towards the door, some with jugs, some with tea-kettles, some with empty hands. As the door slid open, the guards brought in a tank containing about ten gallons of slightly steaming water. Only the bayonets prevented the prisoners from plunging headlong into the tank.

"Move away from the door," yelled a guard, "or we will take the damned water to the devil's mother, and you will get none of it."

The whole car was in a frenzy. Even then the characteristics of the various classes, in an ostensibly classless society, continued to manifest themselves. The workmen who had originally owned their own tea-kettles which still contained a few drops, carefully husbanded, had

suffered least and were, besides, accustomed to discipline; the Urks growled and snarled obscenely, but held back; the small group of the Intelligentsia tried to take command of the situation; but the peasants, untrained, without power of endurance or self-control, and with no vessels of their own, went completely mad, and as they crowded to the door, formed a chaotic mass of struggling humanity which made the entrance of the tank impossible.

Finally, by co-operating with the convoy, we of the Intelligentsia contrived to clear a passage for the tank, which was pushed in the car. Instantly a great bearded peasant plunged his face into the water. Boris tried to pull him away by the shoulders, but it was impossible to move him and the danger of upsetting the tank became serious. As the bearded peasant, almost choking, continued to drink, other peasants, despite the threat of our fists, tried to plunge their heads in also. The experienced guard called to Boris: "Push the tank here."

Boris and I pushed, and it glided easily over the icy floor, while the bearded peasant fell forward on his nose.

"You bitches' children!" bawled the Commander. "We will take the tank away and you will die of thirst and go to the devil's mother, where you belong."

Boris intervened: "Not all of us took part in the disorder and, furthermore, you should have given us the water at the proper time."

"We know what we are doing. Fill your cans so we can take the tank away."

The only way to solve the difficulty, in view of the number of prisoners who had no containers, was to stifle the instincts of private ownership, allowing to each man a large mug of water, and reserving the rest in the kettles for general consumption.



## THE INTRODUCTION TO CAMP LIFE

*Arrival*

At the end of five days our train had covered about 170 miles, and we already had fifteen sick aboard. Boris, with no medicines available, could only take their pulse and help them with sympathetic and consoling words.

On the morning of the sixth day the train stopped. The door of our car was thrown open and before our eyes there appeared a crowd of bystanders in no way suggesting guards. We had no idea where we were, but considering the time which had elapsed I was sure we could not be very far from our destination. At this point an old bespectacled fellow in torn civilian attire, equipped with what was evidently a list of names, stepped up to the doorway:

"Hey, you, who is in charge of this convoy?"

Boris stepped forward. "How many men does your list contain? We must verify them."

I stuck my head out and whispered: "Tell me, please, where are we?"

He looked around cautiously and answered: "Svirstroi."

Notwithstanding the wintry wind blowing in our faces, my heart seemed to feel the warmth of spring. Svirstroi! Not more than 135 miles from the frontier!

After all our bad luck fortune seemed to be favouring us at last.

*Progress?*

After unloading we are lined up, counted, lined up once more, and re-counted. Two prisoners are found missing and, in consequence, the convoy commander is running about like a wild man, from one column to another. Probably, as a matter of fact, the missing ones had never entrained at all.

The convoy soldiers also run about excitedly, searching for the missing. The peasants, nearly crazy, repeatedly upset the order of the lines. Finally, we are lined up once more and again re-counted. But with the same result.

Thus we stood, frozen to the marrow, for some five hours, surrounded all the while by guards with machine-guns on tripods. Around us lies the plain with its scrubby fir-trees. The half-naked Urks, notwithstanding their hardiness, are almost numb. The soldiers of the convoy are also freezing and become increasingly ill-tempered. A dozen of our sick have already fallen down in the snow. We put our knapsacks and spare rags under them, but they are certain to freeze to death unless soon relieved. The lines are repeatedly upset by our efforts to get the fallen ones once more on their feet. The guards threaten us with arrest and return to Leningrad. Boris explains that the sick are unable to stand, and when the soldiers try to raise them to their feet they immediately fall down again. Presently we are approached by a group in Camp clothing, the 'Reception Committee', including a little, half-frozen old man with a stubby moustache, who is, we learn, Chief of the Sanitary Section in the Camp. The leader of the convoy approached Boris with abuse,

screaming at him: "Stop your damned meddling. Take your place in the line, and be quick!"

Boris replies that he is a doctor and, as such, must protest against the convoy's incompetence in allowing people to freeze to death. This hint, with the implied threat of possible report to Leningrad, finally results in the arrival of sleighs from Camp, into which are placed the men who are too feeble to stand. The old sleighs were drawn by half-dead horses, which could only move at a funeral pace, in consequence of which, as we learned later, a number of the prisoners died before reaching Camp.

Meanwhile the machine-guns are loaded once more on the train, which moves slowly westward, while we remained in the empty fields, without convoy of any sort. Half a dozen guards, armed with rifles, try to keep warm around an open fire. On account of their green caps they are called 'Popka' (slang for parrots). These Camp guards are merely a formality—there is no place to which the prisoners can escape in this snowy waste, and they simply stand and dream of warm corners and hot food.

Before we can start for the Camp we have to listen to a half-hour address from an energetic wide-awake young fellow with ears whitened with frost, wearing a *bushlat* (jacket made of two thicknesses of sheeting stuffed with cotton). His theme is the customary obligatory glorification of the Soviet, which no one takes seriously, but it is inescapable. The speech is full of the usual cant about our 'future honest labour', the 'upbuilding of Socialism', the 'classless society', and a lot of other fustian which scarcely interests us with the thermometer at zero. While listening to all this, I am able to ascertain definitely that we really are in Svirstroi, in the Podporozhie section of the White Sea-Baltic Combine (W.B.C.).

Finally, we begin to move towards the Camp, about four miles distant, followed by half a dozen armed guards on foot, with six sleighs to pick up those who fall by the wayside. The Camp takes care of its 'livestock'. From the top of a hill we can see a clearing in the forest, interspersed with small tree stumps, and about forty barracks built of boards, some under roof, others not. This clearing, surrounded by barbed wire, is the 'Concentration Camp', officially called the 'Correctional Labour Camp', whose horrors are discussed in whispers all over Russia.

*Liberty—or Else!*

We were frozen, exhausted, and barely able to march on our tired feet, but there were probably no others among the two thousand marching with us who cherished such optimism and high spirits as we three.

Instead of execution or banishment to the Urals or Siberia, we found ourselves in a Concentration Camp less than 135 miles from the frontier; and, best of all, still together. Perhaps the end of our troubles was not far distant: January, February, and so forth until July—and we are somewhere in the forest on our way to the frontier! How we shall manage I don't know, but it must be arranged somehow. We are strong, optimistic, and unburdened by families left behind in 'liberty'. Our future in the Camp may prove rough, even dangerous, but certainly not devoid of interest. Boris was, perhaps, the least cheerful, since he had experienced the horrors of Solovetsky Islands, from which he had ultimately emerged half-blind.

For ninety-nine per cent of the population, the Camp means a catastrophe. It breaks them physically and

mentally through hunger, cold, hard toil, and unspeakable cruelties. Many die of overwork in the attempt to shorten their sentences. All those who have left families behind are constantly worried about their fate; since, usually, they are deprived of food-cards, which is apt to mean death from starvation, as well as suffering deprivation of all civil rights. From this anomalous position arises the almost incredible circumstance that food parcels are sent from the Camp to people in 'liberty', of which more hereafter.

The sketches which follow are photographic views of Camp life, observed by not unsympathetic eyes. I had travelled extensively over most of Russia, seen many Camps and other similar congregations of people, and this Camp really contained little that was new. All the Concentration Camps are conscript labour institutions, differing little from the old Roman galley, and even more costly in human life. But where in the Soviet Union do you *not* find galleys? In the building of Magnitostroi, 'enthusiasm' cost 22,000 lives; the White Sea-Baltic Canal was built at the cost of 100,000. Sickness and weakness from hunger accounted for the majority of deaths, but there were also a great many people shot for minor infractions of discipline, though no mention of this ever appears in the Soviet Press. While the Camp barracks are disgusting, I have seen workmen's tenements more loathsome still. The volume of 'rights' and the infinitude of lawlessness are much the same as at 'liberty'. Starvation, perhaps, claims a smaller number in the Ukraine and elsewhere than in the Camp, and perhaps the number of individual authorities who have the right to shoot and to torture, accounts for as many victims outside the Camp as within.

*Soviet Barracks*

Our barrack is a wooden structure of rough boards, rudely knocked together, about 150 feet long and 25 feet wide, under a low pitched roof, much resembling an immense coffin. A loosely fitted door occupies the middle of each of the long sides, with a window in the middle of each end. Most of the panes are broken, and the holes are stuffed with old rags.

Two rows of shelves for sleeping, one above the other, run down the long sides within. Before each window stands a 'bourgeoika' (a small sheet-iron stove, the only invention of the time of military Communism). As the occupants are supposed to be away at work all day, the stoves remain unlighted. They are kept going during the night, so that it is intensely hot within ten feet of them, while at a distance of thirty feet the water is congealing. All night there is an indescribable stench from the vermin-infested rags and clothing hung around the stove to dry.

Being built of freshly sawn green pine boards, which naturally shrink as they mature, the walls are full of large cracks, one near my sleeping place being capacious enough to thrust my hand through. While we periodically stuffed all the old rags we could obtain into these cracks, they were continuously being removed by the searchers of V.O.K.H.R. (the armed guards) and the wind whistled freely through them once more. The only illumination for the 300 inmates comes from two chimneyless kerosene lamps; the only furniture, apart from the sleeping shelves, consists of two tables, each about thirty feet long, and four benches of equal length.

I have seen many worse barracks in 'liberty', but, of course, I have never had to live in them. The barracks of the peat exploitation, near Moscow, in which both the

men and their families were housed, were much worse; and the mud hovels of the workers at 'DONBAS' were as bad. But this barrack made the most terrible impression on me, since, unfortunately, I had to regard it as a place in which I was obliged to live, which made a tremendous difference. We sat in our berths and observed the swearing, scuffling, quarrelling mass of humanity which would resolve itself into our fellow inmates. Suddenly someone shrieked that he had been robbed; but it was impossible to distinguish what happened in the darkness and the cloud of makhorka smoke. While the melting snow trickled gently through the holes in the roof, Yura suddenly burst into laughter. "I was thinking of Freddie. Wouldn't it be interesting to have him here with us!"

Freddie was one of our Moscow acquaintances, belonging to a foreign legation. A piece of bread poorly toasted would spoil his temper for an entire day. "If he should be sent here, he would probably hang himself," I said.

"He certainly would," said Yura with emphasis.

### *Baths and Clean Clothes*

We were awakened about one a.m. by a loud call: "All out for bathing." Some thirty armed guards were in attendance, to make certain of universal compliance. We had only just begun to feel warm and doze off, as we were dreadfully sleepy. Why couldn't they have chosen a more convenient hour?

Regulations regarding bathing were strict, to avoid epidemics, and were carried out with pitiless severity. The bath-house is about two miles from Camp, and not badly arranged. You undress in the first room you enter, surrender your outer clothing for disinfection and your remaining clothes for washing, and exchange for clean

garments. The bath includes soap, which is better than in any of the industrial plants where even the cooks often have to dispense with it for months together, or among the general public where it is rarely seen, and it does insure a certain cleanliness. However, the crowded conditions in Camp, and the presence of all kinds of dirty rags, makes the war against lice a losing one. The vermin increase and multiply in even greater proportions than the 'Soviet planned figures'.

There is the usual long wait in a state of nudity. Subsequently, a couple of youngsters, with rather blunt haircutting machines, remove all the hair from faces and bodies. After washing in tepid water we pass to an adjoining tent, almost as cold as the yard, and after another half-hour's wait we get our linen and disinfected clothing. As a result of all these delays, one feels even colder than in the unheated trains. We three spent our time in jumping and boxing, so we experienced no ill-effects, but one of our neighbours on the shelf contracted pneumonia as a result of this exposure.

Again we are out in the open, shivering with cold and with chattering teeth, standing in line to receive our 'Camp equipment' from a Quartermaster.

We three finally step out of line and approach the 'Popka' on guard at the door. I address him authoritatively: "Comrade, let these two pass," and when Boris and Yura have thus passed in, I again approach a few minutes later and say: "Call Sinelnikov!"

'Popka' feels my authority, but replies: "I cannot, Comrade. I am ordered to stand here. You had better go in yourself."

I find it much warmer inside. The place is crowded with prisoners. On the far side of the room is a counter



piled with clothes, in front of which is a howling mob. Each prisoner is, according to Camp regulations, supposed to get a new outfit from top to toe, but, of course, there are never enough to go round. It is only in exceptional cases that one gets a complete new outfit (called first term); more often 'second term', old, but not torn, and most generally, 'third term', old and ragged. Almost half the prisoners will probably receive nothing at all, but continue to wear their own old clothing.

The Head Quartermaster, who decides what shall be allotted to each prisoner, sits alone at a small table, while five assistants move about behind the counter. Before the H.Q.'s penetrating and relentless eyes, the prisoners parade their ragged clothing and try to bargain for new attire.

"One can see you are a squanderer who sells or gambles his clothes away. Get to hell out of here!" he says to an Urk.

A huge peasant in tattered rags comes next. "Your mother bore you without a shirt and you have never had one since, isn't that so? When will you bitches' children ever learn to bring your clothing with you?"

"Citizen Boss," cries the peasant, "we are equally naked at home and the children have nothing to cover their shame."

"Never mind, don't cry about the children. They will soon be here too."

The peasant gets partly 'second term' and partly 'third term' equipment, including a *bushlat*, trousers, felt boots, a cap, and rough mittens, which is much more than he ever had at home.

"My respects to you," says the H.Q. ironically to another Urk who appears before him.

The Urk replies jauntily: "How are you?"

"So you have had no chance to show what you can do?"

"Is it possible that you remember me?" asks the Urk with affected astonishment. "You certainly have good eyes."

"Good enough, so you won't get anything, and you can take your dirty carcass away."

"Comrade Manager," howls the Urk, trembling, "look at me. I am quite naked," and he pulls up his jacket dramatically and displays his dirty belly. "Comrade Manager," he continues, "if I do not get any clothes, I shall die."

"Then die and go to hell!"

While the Urk is pushed away, a group of workers in torn and unsuitable clothing reach the counter. Some get felt boots, some torn *bushlats*. When we three finally reach the counter, the H.Q. looks pitying at our bespectacled countenances. "Wait a little," he says. "It would be difficult to find anything your size at the moment."

I appreciate his sympathy, and agree. Yura, who is so weary that he can scarcely stand, offers a suggestion: "It would be better for all of us to let us help you, and less tiresome for us."

"That is an idea," says the H.Q.

Within a few minutes we are sitting behind the counter, equipped with lists of supplies which still remain to be given out: second term, *bushlats*; third term, trousers, etc., As a result of our help the distribution is greatly hastened. In about half an hour the H.Q. comes up to us, almost fainting with fatigue, and answers my look of inquiry with the remark: "I have been sixty hours at this job, but it will be over to-morrow,

as there will be nothing left. Now we will try to find something for you people. Have you just got here?"

"Yes, yesterday."

"And for how long?"

"Eight years."

"Never mind; don't lose your courage. Remember the German proverb: *Mut verloren—Alles verloren*. As an intelligent man you will find your place, but, of course, it will not be too gay."

"After all, it is no different in 'liberty'."

"But then, you have left your family there, and God knows how they will exist. I have been here five years already, so I know how it is. You are related?"

I explain.

"You are lucky. That makes it easier for all three of you. And is the rest of the family at 'liberty'?"

"Nobody."

"Then you have escaped the bitterest thing of all."

Each of us gets the full outfit, 'first term', except that no boots could be found to fit me. "Come to-morrow by the back way. I will find boots for you," says the H.Q.

We thank him on taking leave.

"Quite unnecessary. In a month you will be doing the same for someone else. You have to remember the *class solidarity of the Intelligentsia*, which the Bolsheviks taught us."

"May I ask your name?"

He gives me a name well known in Moscow literary circles and continues: "I know your name also," and we look at each other with sympathy. "I will tell you something else. If they try to send you to the forest to cut down trees—don't go."

"Won't we be driven?"

"I tell you, don't go!"

"How can we avoid it?"

"Bah! You will learn in time. You might be kept cutting wood for ever. You must manage to sneak away somehow, and then in two or three days they will give you something more suitable, if anything in this hole can be described as suitable."

"But won't they arrest us?"

"Now who would arrest such fellows as you are, with spectacles. Very improbable! Only try to avoid the 'semi-respectable', 'semi-party' people. If your 'Sovietic sight' is well developed, you will know them at once."

My 'Sovietic sight' is developed to such a degree that I can distinguish at a glance beneath their outward characteristics party, semi-party, and non-party people.

Before leaving, the H.Q. gave us the address of a group of professors from the Ukraine, living together in a barrack, and also mentioned several other congenial people to whom he promised to speak about us. After a friendly leave-taking, our den, on our return, seems particularly odious.

We learned from the H.Q. that we were in 'Pogra', the Podporozhie section of the W.B.C., intended to accommodate some 27,000 men. Ten to twelve thousand had arrived in six consignments during the preceding weeks, and everything was in confusion in consequence. The disorder was increased when most of the professors, doctors, and engineers of the Intelligentsia, who were badly needed in control positions, were immediately sent into the forest to fell trees.

Forestry and labour in the open would, with our physical strength, have been the work we preferred. Unfortunately, however, those assigned to 'common

work' lost all individuality and were absorbed in the 'mass', and treated thereafter without ceremony. We could not risk being hopelessly caught in the cogs of the G.P.U. machine, and, perhaps in consequence, being transported eventually to some distant region from which escape might prove impossible. We determined, therefore, to follow the H.Q.'s suggestions at all costs.

### *A Successful Swindle*

We hardly had time to warm ourselves and begin to rest after our return from the bath about 4.30 a.m. when we were awakened by loud calls to arise. Six o'clock and still night outside! The wind howls through the cracks in the walls, while the tired, frozen, hungry prisoners begin to move around in the darkness. The prisoners assigned to breakfast duty come in with pots of barley-porridge, sufficient to furnish about a glassful to each man. Naturally there weren't any glasses or spoons or other utensils, save what a fortunate few had happened to bring with them. Miserable as the food was, everybody tried greedily to secure his share.

Boris is at the head of our provision 'artel' (Association) and brings the porridge himself. He usually succeeds in getting a little more than his fair share. We whittled little wooden paddles for those who had no spoons. Boris had no time to eat, as he had to bargain with the engineer, whom we saved from the Urks on the train and who was now brigadier of one of the workers' brigades, to allow us to shirk forest duty. As ostensible members of his brigade, and with his co-operation, it looked as though it would be possible to invent some stratagem to achieve our end.

Lepioshkin, the engineer, had had previous Camp

experience (in Leningrad, building the new G.P.U. House), and knew how to manage these things. All we had to do was to keep out of the line-up at the roll-call, and to 'fix' the orderly to overlook one of us remaining in the barrack to guard our property. It also was essential to see the chief of the column, who looked an intelligent fellow, with whom one might come to terms.

We managed easily enough by remaining in the latrine until the column had disappeared. Then we returned to the barracks, squared the orderly with a cigarette and sundry promises, devoured some bread and hot water (known as tea), and went to sleep.

### *Practical Psychology*

After our nap it was decided that Yura and I should go out to reconnoitre, while Boris remained in the barrack. He did not wish to be seen in order to avoid the danger of mobilisation as a doctor. Another reason was that he was physically more capable of repelling a possible raid of the Urks *en masse* than Yura and I put together. Yura and I therefore strolled slowly along the Camp street enjoying at least the pleasure of freedom to choose our own direction. While walking in leisurely fashion, we noticed the Chief of a column coming towards us. Yura began talking in English while I displayed my packet of Torgsin cigarettes. We lifted our caps and bowed with politeness and composure, much as we might have done on the Nevsky Prospect. The Commander acknowledged our salutes with some surprise, and passed on. I was sure he would not stop us. Presently I noticed that the creaking of his boots in the snow had ceased. He had probably begun to wonder why we were not at work and was, perhaps, inclined to ask a question; but I was inwardly

sure that he wouldn't. Soon the creaking of his boots was resumed—psychology is a great thing!

The Chief of the column is apt often to be in a quandary since there is in effect no ascertainable law; and while he has the authority to make life quite disagreeable for those under him, he runs risks in some cases of reports being sent in against him. His diagnosis of us would probably run along some such lines as these: "These men are evidently new arrivals who have managed to get hold of good clothing and first-class cigarettes. They may have reasons for being independent. While I can easily make things unpleasant, I am likely to risk trouble if I do so."

I had seen the Chief of Staff and noticed that he had an intelligent face, and felt confident that he would reason in this way. With a fool, it might have been entirely different.

### *The Doctor*

Later in the day my technique was less successful. As I was walking alone I was halted by a sharp challenge: "What do you mean by walking round the Camp by yourself!"

Turning, I saw the Chief of the Sanitary Section, the same old fellow with the stubby moustache who had met us on arrival. It was apparent that he was nearly frozen, and he looked as if he might be suffering from liver trouble. Three other men of semi-official appearance accompanied him. I approached the group quietly and calmly, wondering what I was to do next. Later, I learned that this noisy, but good-hearted old fellow, Dr. Shukvets, was himself under a ten-year sentence, of which more than half remained to be served, and that he was inclined, from the effects of hardship and disease, to

scream at people, though he never meant any harm. Meanwhile, he could not, of course, know that our principal reason for walking alone was to discuss plans for escape. "Do you take this Concentration Camp for a health resort?" cried the old man. "You had better learn to submit to Camp discipline and not break the rules of quarantine."

Smiling, although inwardly troubled, I took out my wonder-working package of cigarettes and replied: "I have spoken to the Chief of Section, Comrade Doctor, and believe he could give you full information as to my movements."

"Even the Section Chief has no right to break quarantine rules," bawls the Doctor, but in a lower tone. The men with him smile at me in a friendly fashion.

"I have no means of knowing the Chief's rights, Doctor. But as a matter of fact, you know we have no quarantine," I replied.

"The reason is that 'gentlemen' like yourself walk about as you wish, and the Sanitary Section has to answer for it. Return to your barrack at once!"

"But, Doctor, I have orders to appear this evening at Staff Headquarters. Whom am I to obey?"

The old man was evidently troubled, but disinclined to retreat. "You see, Doctor," I continue sympathetically, "the situation is, of course, farcical. With no organisation, with hundreds of men wandering all over the Camp, with the food in the kitchen infected by previous handling, with filthy rags all about the place, what can you do? Of course, you have to attempt to combat all this, but what real isolation can you have? May I offer you a cigarette?"

"I do not smoke." But his companions each take one.

"Are you an engineer?"



“No, a planner.”

“Hm! All these planners, with their idiotic plans. According to plan, I should have twelve doctors as assistants, and I have none.”

“Evidently the G.P.U. have not planned well, for instance in Moscow you can still see doctors walking about.”

“Have you been away from Moscow long?”

Presently the old man shook hands all round and took himself off. I had further promised the Doctor to include all kinds of sanitary rules important to him in my plans. I had made the acquaintance of his companions, two of whom were engineers and the third a Sanitary Inspector from ‘Pogra’. One of the engineers remarked: “You got out of that adroitly enough, but the fact is that the Section Chief is away.”

“I think you will admit that I could, theoretically, have talked to him by telephone. That was a risk that I had to take.”

“You don’t have to worry about the Doctor,” said the engineer. “He is really one of the best old fellows imaginable. If you play Preference, come up to our cabin sometime and we will have a game and you can give us the latest news about Moscow.”

### *‘Enthusiasm’*

K.V.CH. is a large two-story frame building, full of corridors, partitioned spaces, and unexpected nooks and corners. It is crowded with unfortunates, who were nevertheless compelled to continue working in ‘Shock work’ although exhausted from malnutrition, hard work, and sleepless nights. Doors with inscriptions: P.E.O., U.R.CH., O.A.D., K.V.CH., indicated sections like planning, economic accounting-distributing, general-

administrative, cultural-educational, etc. The whole building is icily cold, and reeks with the tang of makhorka smoke and the pungent smell of the small stove.

I enter K.V.CH. and discover its Chief to be the young man with the frozen ears who had made us a long speech when we arrived. On closer examination, I note clever eyes, with a slightly sarcastic expression, general intelligence, and rather greater maturity than I had expected. This seems like a man I can talk to 'in earnest', as explained in the following paragraph.

If a man is a non-party man and stupid, avoid him; should he be a party man and stupid, avoid him at all costs; if he is a non-party man with intelligence, negotiations will be easy; if he is a party man who is clever, it will be harder, but you will succeed. All this bears a very definite relation to the question of 'earnestness', which I must discuss at this point. Ninety-nine per cent of any efforts on the part of the Intelligentsia to accomplish anything are doomed to failure in the face of the insuperable inertia resulting from enforced 'enthusiasm', divers 'khalturas', and farcical and impossible tasks.

Imagine, for instance, that you are a physician in a provincial hospital, which is very different from a model hospital in Moscow. You are expected in the course of curing your patients to feed them adequately, to give them the appropriate medicaments, and simultaneously, to conduct Social-Education work among the charwomen, watchmen, and nurses, as well as to organise 'Socialistic competitions', and 'shock work' to increase output and inculcate discipline. In making this effort you are seriously hampered because the commissariat is defective, and much of the food is stolen by charwomen, who only receive thirty-seven roubles a month, and are

constantly hungry. You have none of the drugs you need most, merely shockingly inadequate substitutes, and you are equally at a loss as to instruments, bandages, etc. You have no right to complain of these things officially, since that would be ‘discrediting the power’, nor can you perform the various kinds of socialistic tasks required of you because you would then have no time for your medical duties. Meanwhile, you are expected to exhale ‘enthusiasm’ and to demand a similar emotional intensity from your subordinates, and, simultaneously, to keep up with the reams of material constantly being issued on such subjects as dialectical materialism, the history of the Communist party, the work of the Professional Unions, factory and sanitary propaganda in the vicinity and to assist in editing the hospital wall-bulletins.

All of this nonsense is ‘required’. You must pretend to carry it out completely. Even though any fool can tell you it is unnecessary to take it too seriously. But the ‘Activists’ believe it is really essential.

Now, let us imagine the inopportune arrival of a collaborator, inclined to take all this nonsense seriously. He is likely to begin by attempting to put into force a ‘Socialistic competition’ in efficiency between your hospital and some neighbouring institution, which can have no outcome but inconvenience of every kind. One point in the competition may be the reduction to a minimum of the swarms of vermin. Try to imagine efforts to estimate the number of lice in each hospital for purposes of comparison! And remember that the competition may have as many as sixty additional requirements no more easy to carry out, yet they are all equally compulsory and may each cause you endless trouble if your activities receive unwelcome publicity.

This same restless enthusiast may blurt out in the Communist cell: "Our doctors must be compelled to make reports about the dialectic materialism of the stomach diseases." As likely as not he may report that a poor charwoman was seen furtively lapping up some presumably stolen porridge. Presently your local newspaper will carry headlines: "Plundering of People's Porridge in Hospital", or a denunciation will be sent to the higher authority, which will result in your serious reprimand, while the poor charwoman will be sent to a Concentration Camp, and you will be unable to procure a substitute. Or he may start a scandal about unsanitary conditions based on seeing a charwoman's dirty face. You would like to say to your collaborator: "You trouble-making son of a bitch, you know as well as I do that each citizen in the U.S.S.R. may receive half a bar of soap to last a year near the end of the second Five-Year Plan, so where the hell am I going to get soap to remedy insanitary conditions?" Only, of course, you cannot tell him so. Competitive nonsense of this kind excludes all possibility of real accomplishment.

In 1929, when famine was general and people had obviously little interest in sport, we were making great efforts in the sport organisation to prevent a complete collapse, so that physical degeneration might be, to some extent, arrested by open-air exercise. At this juncture one of the enthusiastic Activists inquires publicly: "Why does physical culture remain politically indifferent? Why doesn't it include propaganda about World Revolution?" The result was an edict prescribing compulsory lectures on political subjects for at least ten minutes to precede all exercises. The natural result was that the people, who always had to listen to such lectures everywhere else, were

in no mood at the time to be sermonised still further and they simply stayed away and the Sport organisation was still further disrupted. Anyone taking the stand of common sense in such situations, even the highest Commissars, will be sent to a Concentration Camp on the complaint of an Activist. After all, the Activist is not interested in sport, but only in ‘making his career’. Similar preposterous examples of the Soviet ‘khaltura’ can be found in other fields of activity. In the department of railways, most of the engineers who had the sense to oppose the ‘through train system’, which eventually brought about an almost total paralysis of the railway system, were deported or shot. Some 300 professors who had opposed some of the farcical Soviet educational experiments were deported to the Solovetsky Islands. Three years later the experiments they had opposed were abandoned, the older system restored, and the recent graduates compelled to return to complete their education. Meanwhile, all these unfortunates, victims of Activist denunciations, had been condemned, with no effort on the part of the ‘higher ups’ to save them from their unmerited deportation.

Throughout the Revolution there has been a plethora of high-sounding but empty-headed efforts in the direction of ‘Socialist competition’, ‘shock work’, ‘enthusiasm’, ‘social plurality’, ‘light cavalry’ (the most active groups of Komsomols), ‘purging of institutions’ (by means of dismissal of undesirable members), and many more equally absurd. All these are insane experiments of the Socialist organisation, which have costs billions of roubles and sacrificed millions of lives and are all destined, sooner or later, to disaster. But there is nothing anyone can do about it. Soviet Russia lives under a complete

absolutism which tries to appear enlightened, but is actually on the level of an Oriental despotism.

You will say, perhaps, that all this is too stupid to be true. But, unfortunately, it is true. And is it not stupid that 160,000,000 people have for eighteen years past been resident in a vast territory of good soil and starving most of the time? Is it not stupid that three families have to be crowded into a single room in Moscow, while the millions needed for housing are lavished on projects like the 'Palace of Soviets' (The Communist Tower of Babel), the 'Dynamo', etc.? Is it not stupid that the construction of the Dniepostroi Water Plant went on day and night, winter and summer, at enormous sacrifice of lives and money for years, and now functions at only twelve per cent of its capacity? Is it not stupid to let horses, cows, and pigs starve for lack of fodder while spending tens of millions importing and trying to breed rabbits, which are certain to succumb from unsuitable food and climate? Is it not stupid to try to domesticate Karelian elks and Kamchatka bears instead? Is it not stupid to import, in the vicinity of the Arctic Circle, for the purpose of building the White Sea-Baltic Canal, 60,000 Usbeks and Khirghizians from southern Russia who will probably perish within six months?

All this is revoltingly stupid, but this stupidity is armed to the teeth. Behind it are the machine-guns of the G.P.U. and there is nothing that can remedy the evil.

It must be understood that such good results as are accomplished—and more than a few such occur despite grave difficulties due to Soviet red tape and scarcity of necessary supplies and equipment—are due to the ability and energy of individuals. Let it be said before dismissing

the subject that, despite all the nonsense I have enumerated, the unlucky Soviet doctor does very well for his patients, despite his difficulties, and even organises courses of instruction for promising students among the workers. And I, while working in the sport activities section, managed to squeeze out of the 'professional unions' about 15,000,000 roubles with which I succeeded in building some fifty parks, swimming pools, sports grounds, etc. But these achievements were in spite of 'enthusiasm', not because of it.

The great Russian 'khaltura' does not, therefore, involve the manufacture of nothing but 'khaltura' by its doctors, engineers, sports promoters, etc. I remember Maxim Gorki, in his reminiscences of Lenin, saying: "The Russian Intelligentsia is, and will long remain, the only old horse drawing the cart of Russian culture."

The principal examples of 'khaltura' in the Concentration Camps are 'enthusiasm' and 'reconstruction'. 'Enthusiasm' within the Camps makes no more sense than outside in 'liberty'. 'Reconstruction' is not worth a penny. It may convert a petty thief into a bandit, or a half-mad former kulak into a frenzied counter-revolutionary who will delight in cutting the throat of any Communist he encounters. More than that can scarcely be expected from it.

But woe to you if you allow yourself to question openly either 'enthusiasm' or 'reconstruction'. Should you be overheard by an Activist or any fool who takes these slogans seriously, the consequence to you will be distinctly unpleasant.

*Ilyin*

As I said, I entered the room of K.V.CH. (Cultural-

Educational Section), and Comrade Ilyin, Chief of the K.V.C.H., invited me to his office.

The office proved to be a small room, more like a closet, furnished with a common table and two chairs, one with only three legs.

"Sit down", said he. "How did you manage to escape going to work?"

"I did not escape, I simply did not go."

"Ah! Was that your brother with you in the column yesterday?"

"Brother and son. I may say they both admired your eloquence."

"Drop it. I tried to hurry it all I could."

"Still you kept us all standing twenty minutes in the snow."

"One can't do less. It is in the statute."

"So, complying with the statute, one is likely to freeze his ears. How are they, by the way?"

"The devil knows. The skin has already peeled off seven times. Well, I can see first, that you want to work in K.V.C.H., and secondly, that you have offended against those 'paragraphs'<sup>1</sup> which exclude you from this section; thirdly, we will arrange it somehow, nevertheless." And he looks at me with a triumphant smile.

"I can't see on what grounds you based your second conclusion."

"Bah! I have a practised eye. Why are you here? Exceeding your authority, wrecking, stealing, counter-revolution? If for exceeding your authority, you belong to the Administrative section; if for stealing, Supply section. But there is no place for a counter-revolutionary except in the Cultural-Education section. Am I logical?"

<sup>1</sup> Paragraphs: Clauses of the Code under which I was sentenced.



"I agree."

"According to statute, we are not permitted to accept counter-revolutionaries; I imagine, however, that among the counter-revolutionaries you did not occupy any minor position."

"And what follows?"

"I do not imagine you were deported for a trifle. Moreover, from the Soviet point of view, your face is very unreliable. Is this your first imprisonment?"

"Approximately the first."

"Amazing!"

"Then let's play Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. What do you find in my face?"

Ilyin, piercing me with his eyes, moves his fingers almost automatically. "How shall I put it? Audacity, the impudence to exercise your own judgment—a critically observing personality—none of which we like here."

"True," I agree.

"But if, in spite of all this, you have remained at liberty all this time (I have been here five years), you will pass. Now, to get down to brass tacks, what have you to offer?"

I enumerate all my various professions.

"As far as I can see, you are more of a department store than a man. Consider yourself engaged. You needn't mention your paragraphs. By the way, what are they?"

I tell him.

"Oh, ho!—Is that all? Well, hold your tongue about it. You will be well accustomed to your surroundings before they come across your list, and by that time nobody will interfere with you. I have to run to meet an arriving transport."

"Give me some note or paper so that I won't be detained from coming."

"Write one for yourself."

"How for myself?"

"Quite simple—such a person is required to work at K.V.CH."

"Seal, signature?"

"You have no seal—nor have I, and, as for the signature, who will know it?"

"Hm!" I said.

"When you were at liberty, did you *always* live and travel on the strength of genuine documents? Accustom yourself to the idea that here you will live on the basis of false documents exclusively. In your note, include the three of you. To-morrow we will arrange. Good-bye."

Ilyin's prophecy did not come true. Strange as it may seem, I lived, moved, and ate while at Camp on the strength of genuine documents alone. Man proposes, but God or the G.P.U. disposes. I did not get into the K.V.CH., and I never saw Ilyin again.

### *An Obstacle Race*

Yura had meanwhile gone to the P.E.O. (Planning Economic section) to try for a position as a typist. On my way back I met him in the company of two armed guards. In passing, he said to me hurriedly: "O.K. Have a job at Third Division."

This I could not thoroughly grasp. He had gone to P.E.O. and was now on the way to G.P.U., but from his cheerful manner I felt easy in my mind.

Returning to our barrack, I relieved Boris, who promptly left to look up the professors from the Ukraine. The barrack was cold, dark, and disgusting. Several

Urks were sneaking near, waiting an opportunity to steal our knapsacks, but I continued to sit on the shelf, thoroughly on the alert, with a piece of firewood lying near me for a weapon. The Urks departed, muttering: "Wait, you devil. Another time we will catch you without your piece of wood."

Boris returned with the news of the opening of new perspectives. The professors were working in the U.R.CH. (Accounting-Distributing section) of Podporozhie. While the work in this section was unpleasant, there was no Camp, no barbed wire, no barracks, and no Urks. One had the choice of living in tents or in peasants' huts with electric lights. The prospect was alluring.

Yura returned an hour later, considerably confused. We crawled into the depths of our shelf and he told me the story in English. After demonstration on the typewriter, the manager of P.E.O. had told him that he could consider himself engaged as typist. At that moment the Chief of the Third Division (G.P.U.) strolled in and remarked: "Hallo, a good typist. Just what I need. I will take this young man for my office." As no one dare oppose the G.P.U., the matter was settled and the two guards took Yura to the Third Division.

He was gratified for several reasons. His stay there would probably prove of considerable advantage in our projected escape. He could ascertain the nature of W.O.K.H.R.'s 'secrets' (meaning concealed posts of armed pickets) and also the methods of arresting those who were endeavouring to escape, and so on. The walls were hung with maps which could be appropriated, if required. It might further be possible to steal revolvers. After a short test he was ushered into another room and his new Chief was informed that: "This fellow will be

your typist." The Chief turned out to be the same Chekist who had played the rôle of conductor in carriage N 13, when we were arrested, and he at once recognised Yura.

"Splendid," he said. "Now how does it happen that you were sent here? And really what funny fellows you are. After three years' preparation, to lose the game on account of a woman." Whereupon he narrated the whole story of our capture to the other officials in the room. "But where are the others?—All these fellows are as strong as oxen. This fellow's uncle broke the arm of one of our chaps so thoroughly that he still has it in a splint. In any case, I did not expect to meet you again."

With great garrulity the Chief had narrated the entire story of Babenko's rôle in our drama. This was unfortunate as the news was likely to be spread through the Camp within a few days and extreme precautions would be taken to prevent any further attempts to escape. Certainly we must get away from Pogra, if only to Podporozhie, if only to stop the blabbing mouth of this Chekist.

Boris immediately went back to the professors to try to arrange an immediate transfer, but upon his return another surprise upset our plans. While the barrack was filled with a wet and noisy crowd of wood-choppers, two men, apparently of the Intelligentsia, pushed their way through and one asked: "Which of you is Boris Solonevich?"

"I," said my brother.

"What is *oleum ricini*?"

This question quite startled Boris for a minute, but he answered: "Castor Oil. Why do you ask?"

"And what is *acidum arsenicum*? In what solution is *acidum carbolicum* used?"

While neither of us grasped the significance of these queries, the men exchanged glances and one asked: "Fit?"—and received the reply: "Yes."

"You are appointed as doctor at the dispensary," said the first man. "Take your belongings and come with me. A long line of people is standing there waiting for you. You will live in the cabin near the dispensary."

So these 'mysterious' questions were an examination for the qualifications of a doctor! We were so surprised and embarrassed at this *contretemps* that we did not immediately take it in. Boris secured all our belongings, and, accompanied by Yura and the two men, went to his 'cabin'. It was only a small room in the dispensary barrack, but it had one great advantage for us, since we were certain that our possessions would be safe from raids by the Urks.

We passed a very distressing night, for it was thawing and the melting snow came through the cracks in the roof, soaking us thoroughly. In the morning Yura and I carried our wet blankets and the rest of our baggage over to Boris. After warming ourselves in his room, we went to Podporozhie to pull wires, and by noon we were both practically appointed to the U.R.CH.

### *Revenge*

Meanwhile another transport arrived, bringing 2,000 prisoners for whom there was neither accommodation nor clothing. People were shuttled about from barrack to barrack in the effort to provide more house room. Brigades of carpenters were hurriedly putting more of the unfinished buildings under cover, and constructing new barracks. In the camp streets, softened by the thaw, half-starved horses, drawing newly-cut timber, were con-

tinually stalling in the ruts, while columns of novices wandered around knee deep in mud. These late peasant-worker arrivals were even more unfortunate than we were, as there was no equipment left; and more trains still were on the way.

Among these poor people, dazed and stupefied by the prospect of long imprisonment, the Urks glided like snakes, or congregated like packs of wolves, to rob these poor dazed unfortunates of the little they possessed. In the evening they attacked three prisoners waiting to receive the bread supply for the whole brigade, killing one and severely wounding another, while the food, of course, disappeared. As no more could be obtained, the whole brigade had to go hungry for a day. Later, when we were away, a whole brigade of Urks, armed with Finnish knives, entered our barrack and plundered the bundles of almost all the inmates. As the camp administration remained indifferent, the barrack inmates resolved to avenge themselves. When I appeared the next day I was horrified to see a man hanging from a pine-tree, his feet just off the ground, his hair matted with blood, while one eye, out of the socket, hung down his face. The last sign of life was a convulsive twitching of his foot. Another man was lying on a heap of snow, with his head smashed beyond all recognition. The snow all around was stained with congealed blood and clots of brain.

A small crowd of peasants and workers standing in a group seemed to enjoy the spectacle thoroughly. One remarked: "Now I think this stealing will stop for a while."

This lynching was both a punishment and a challenge to the Urks, as well as a protest against the callous conduct of the administration, which still remained inactive.

These outbursts of the people's fury, cruel and unorganised, occur periodically all over the country. How many smashed heads of Activists, village policemen, and rural Chekists are part payment for the vast Socialist plunder of the Russian moujiks? And ever in the depths of Russia, without intermission, fierce conflicts continue—a struggle for bread, for life, for blood. When the people of the G.P.U. see such sights as these mutilated Urks, then forebodings of their own fate, by no means pleasant, must rise before them.

A few days later I met our Urk leader, Mikhailov. He bore marks of severe punishment—a black eye, a bruised face, and badly cut lips.

"How are you, Comrade Solonevich? Perhaps you will treat me to a little makhorka?"

"You are welcome to it in return for the lessons you gave me."

"They were useful to you?"

"Of course."

"Yes, here we know every comma."

"But it seems that you, too, have recently learned some additional commas!"

"Bah! It was a trifle. I was beaten and five of my colleagues were killed. They will fume and rage a while, but we will win in the end, because we have organisation." The old Urk leader smiled with all his customary assurance. "None of these fellows will get away alive. They are as unorganised as a lot of sheep, while we are well organised."

I observed the Urk with respect—he reminded me of Stalin.

*Podporozhie*

On this frosty winter evening Yura and I walk along the beaten path on the frozen River Svir to Podporozhie. We can see the sparkling lights of our destination straight in front of us, about two miles distant. The ground is deep in snow after the long winter, the river bank covered with a dense growth of pine. We can hear the rapid rolling of some unfrozen streams through the woods.

Finally, we arrive at what was once a prosperous village of large two-story peasants' houses built with heavy timbers, decorated with fretwork—Podporozhie. The paint of the shutters has long since faded. Where the peasants once lived in comfort, their children now roam about the Camp, trying to wheedle scraps of bread, herring-heads, and refuse from the prisoners.

We had received a summons to come to U.R.CH., but without definite promise of work. This is the accounting-distributing division of the camp, which registers all the prisoners, transfers them from one point or division to another, assigns the work, controls the terms of confinement, the length of sentences, and receives claims, etc.

In this typical institution half a dozen small rooms are furnished with tables of rough unpainted boards—not always planed—and stools to match or with just pieces of birch logs for seats. The rooms are as overcrowded as our train had been. They are cluttered with dossiers, petitions, papers and cards, and packets of all sorts. We are told to sit down and wait, but as there is nothing to sit on, we use our knapsacks for chairs. The room is clouded with makhorka smoke, thick as a London fog. The Chiefs curse and swear even more than in the G.P.U. or at Pogra. People move about looking for logs to rest on. A man begs a clerk to lend him a penholder, as without



it he will be reprimanded for failure to complete his task. Unfortunately, the clerk has none of his own. As there is no ink in U.R.CH., the clerk is removing the core of a copying pencil! He hopes to dissolve it in water as a substitute. As a result of foul air, smoke, and profanity for long hours daily, all the workers appear exhausted, and their faces are actually a horrible green colour.

Somewhere from the depths of the room emerges an old man, Comrade Nasiedkin, one of the most energetic and dexterous officials in the U.R.CH. A pair of broken iron-rimmed spectacles, patched with a piece of string, adorn his purple, wrinkled face and small, watery eyes. You can see the slyness of the old, experienced chancery rat. "How do you do? You are the lawyer from Pogra? And this is your son? We have two typewriters, but nobody here knows how to use them. The staff isn't worth a damn. But come along. Take your luggage with you, or it will disappear. All you need to do here is to turn your back, and you find yourself robbed. Our Juridical section does not function perfectly yet! You will find plenty of work."

So, following our garrulous leader, we enter the jungles of the U.R.CH. Through the makhorka smoke, we see a lot of frantically busy people writing, registering and swearing at the same time. The ugliest imaginable people, with the low foreheads of animals! The old fellow begins to rummage through drawers and boxes of dossiers scattered on the floor, and calls two other chancery rats to help him. Finally, he finds our documents, questionnaires, and sentences, and settling his spectacles on the bridge of his nose begins to read. "Solonevich, Ivan—let me see—education—verdict—paragraphs." At the word 'paragraphs', he halts, pulls his glasses down,

and looks at me. I can read in his eyes the question: "What on earth made you do it, and what shall we do with you?"

I reply with a glance which might be interpreted: "It's up to you—you are the host." I understand the old man's problem. You must not employ counter-revolutionaries except in hard labour, while apart from counter-revolutionaries you have no intelligent people for clerical work. The spectacles climb again to the bridge of his nose, and he begins to read Yura's dossier. Finally, he says: "Everything is in order. Now I will show you what you have to do and what your duties will be." On the way he whispers: "Don't mention your paragraphs under any circumstances. We will arrange that later."

*Legal Adviser to the U.R.CH.*

Thus I became leading legal adviser and economist of U.R.CH., with more than half a ton of disconnected and crumpled dossiers and two inferior subordinate legal colleagues. One of these had held the position of Chief, until my appointment, though he was almost entirely illiterate. To my inquiry as to his education, he had answered: "Promoted worker."

He had originally belonged to the 'Communist Youth' and was imprisoned for taking part in a collective rape. He had never heard of the existence of a Criminal Code in the Soviet Union until I informed him of it. Meanwhile, in the archives of this 'promoted worker' there had accumulated the claims and petitions of over 4,000 prisoners, each involving the fate of a living human creature. Nasiedkin pointed to these thousands of papers and remarked: "Here are your dossiers. You must find out for yourself what's what," and vanished.

In this way I was initiated into my future duties and given *carte blanche*. I do not believe that Nasiedkin himself had any idea about 'what was what'; nor did I consider it advisable to inquire. My subordinate colleagues presently melted away and disappeared. When I tried to induce one of them to return, I discovered that this half-illiterate and foolish fellow displayed a much stronger inclination towards the kitchen with its possibilities of a double portion of porridge than towards the law. So I found myself alone with a waggon load of dossiers and the sinister countenances of some thirty Soviet Activists, and the Soviet 'Active' is an organisation far more dangerous than the G.P.U. itself.

## THE SOVIET 'ACTIVE'

*'The Conveying Belt to the Masses'*

A correct picture of the conditions existing in the Soviet Union would be incomplete without the tremendously important factor of the millions of the Soviet 'Active', which Stalin has described as the 'conveying belt to the masses'.

The 'Active' was originally chosen by a method of 'natural selection'. It has now coalesced into a homogeneous mass forming a buffer between the Soviet authorities and the Russian people.

The Soviet 'Active' was created for three special purposes: Espionage, Oppression, and Spoils. From the point of view of the Government, every citizen, from yesterday's Chairman of the World Comintern to the lowest peasant, is suspect. Espionage, therefore, must penetrate to the deepest recesses of the nation. It does. Without the oppression which follows, espionage alone would be useless. Consequently, ruthless oppression is of primary importance. The daily routine of espionage, oppression, and spoliation is performed by the cadres of the 'Active'. The G.P.U. is at the summit of the system, but it does not penetrate to the masses. For this no staff, however large, would be sufficient. This, therefore, is the exclusive concern of the 'Active', and it works practically free from control or appeal.

The importance of the 'Active', moreover, is that it is devoted more entirely to the present Soviet power than the G.P.U. itself, and is even more reliable than the G.P.U. Included in the ranks of the 'Active' are lower members of the Communist party, with some members of the Komsomols, besides a great number of people who wish to become members of the party, or get positions in the G.P.U. When we remember that 90 per cent of the population is hostile to Stalin's proceedings and that even a considerable number of Komsomol and Communist members share in this hostility, the powerful and ever dependable support of the 'Active' is, as may readily be imagined, indispensable to the Soviet system.

To be an Activist requires a peculiar mental make-up. As the famous Saltykov has written, one must be a 'scamp of hardened conscience'.

### *The Origin of the 'Active'*

The first of these scoundrels was, psychologically rather than chronologically, a celebrated little Komsomol girl, whose name has become a byword. She had run to the G.P.U. to lodge information against her own mother. Whether she was actuated by anger following an inopportune spanking or by purely idealistic considerations is of secondary importance. It is clear that after such conduct, neither her own nor any other home would have welcomed this little spy. Although in principle supporting any kind of espionage, no Communist family would want an agent for the G.P.U. in the home circle.

The first step towards joining the Soviet 'Active' is marked by betrayal, and the next by isolation from

society. The same process applies to the 'Active' in general. The recruiting is made easier by the dreadful hardships inherent in the lives of the masses under Soviet rule. In consequence, the tendency to enjoy the advantages of any higher class is an inducement to enter the 'Active', and serves also to explain the existing craving for education and 'enthusiasm'. The road to advancement by education is impeded by four or five years of semi-starvation in dingy student lodgings, with an excellent opportunity of developing tuberculosis. Promotion through common work is slow and does not lead very far. On the other hand, entrance into the 'Active' promises quick results and a real career.

To initiate such a career various methods are available. Anyone can push himself forward in a village Soviet, or trade union, or kolkhoz, or factory meeting. He may have no oratorical powers, but he has available a long series of standardised sentences which are always useful, though they have long since lost all semblance of sense. Typical specimens are: "Fight the class enemy without pity"; "Entirely and completely supporting the general line of the party"; "Standing on guard for the 'decisive' (or concluding) year of the Five-Year Plan", and so forth. The utterance of these sentences gives the speaker a claim to devotion and inflexibility. Originality must be avoided at all costs, as dangerous. The impression conveyed to the audience is: "Look! Look! Our Peter is climbing into the 'Activists'!"

To climb higher up the ladder, denunciation becomes essential. For instance, our Peter may jump up at a factory meeting and blurt out: "According to my proletarian opinion, the engineer Titov is sabotaging the execution of the plan in our section because he is not of

our class. His father was a priest and he is a chip of the bourgeois Intelligentsia."

For the engineer this is of little consequence, for the G.P.U. know all about him without the aid of the Activist, but the latter will make some 'political capital' out of the accusation for himself, because he is ready and not afraid to make denunciations. In a village meeting, Peter may say: "The 'kulak supporter', Titov, is leading anti-kolkhoz agitation." This may send Titov to a Concentration Camp; but in any event it will help to advance the Activist. If this does not work, he can say of some fellow worker: "Petrov deliberately releases defective production"; or "Sidorov is a 'false shock worker'," and for this reason has no right to the extra shock dinner in the plant dining-room; or "Stepanov avoids taking part in 'proletarian demonstrations' which are obligatory". All the above accusations will result in punishments of varying degrees of severity.

Such public denunciations are sound proof of political reliability, and smooth the way to further advancement for the Activist. At this stage of the game, all those whose consciences are insufficiently elastic for general denunciation are about to lose caste. From this point the Activist will perform definite tasks, though still without extra pay. He may have to do some reconnoitring for the 'Communist Cell', take part in 'light cavalry' work, uncover 'malicious shirkers', 'gadabouts', and 'wreckers'; and he may be selected to collect arrears in payments due to Soviet organisations, like M.O.P.R. and Osoaviakhim. In addition, he may search peasants' houses for hidden grain, spy out those suspected of anti-Soviet tendencies, and send in damaging reports of all kinds. Having thus passed his novitiate, and sufficiently hardened his con-

science, the unmitigated scoundrel finally receives a portfolio and a post.

*'Curiouser and Curiouser'*

This first post will generally be an unimportant one, and it will be necessary for the Activist to advance towards that horizon where appear, like twin stars, the 'party card' and a position in the G.P.U. These ultimate objectives are, however, still distant. Most of the Activists are destined to become chairmen of kolkhozes and village Soviets, members of factory committees and grain storage organisations or managers of co-operative stores, or else they are allotted to police duty or move into the lower espionage organisations of the G.P.U. Because of the constant changes of administrative methods and anti-Soviet reactions from various quarters, the Activist is likely to be ordered all over the country without warning for 'shock' and 'overshock' campaigns, everywhere on the look-out for hidden 'class enemies'.

The work of the Activists is dangerous and their rewards are small. Consequently, there are few applicants for this career from people of brains or ability. The typical Activist is something of a dullard, with his 'class instinct' compensating for his lack of education, and more of a brute, with a ready willingness to perform any function his limited capacity will admit. In addition, he can stir up 'enthusiasm' without much effort, and is very useful in spreading through the country the various slogans which the Government wishes popularised. When it comes to anything constructive, the Activist can be depended upon to produce a complete muddle in a very short time. It is only in robbing, killing, and 'dekulakising' that he is really effective.



One such enterprise in which the ‘Active’ was of the greatest assistance to the Soviets was the extraordinary experiment of rabbit breeding. Officialdom was too indolent to devote the great expenditure of time and energy required to restore to prosperity the cattle and pig breeding and poultry industries, which had declined to less than half their earlier proportions while under the collectivist system. It was much easier to try something entirely new, such as rabbit breeding, and here was a splendid opportunity for ‘enthusiasm’. The fact that the rabbit is an animal completely unadapted to the severe Russian climate, and that the food it needs is not present in sufficient quantity, were esteemed very minor obstacles. With money raised at the expense of starving pigs, millions of rabbits were imported from abroad. In Moscow, where there was insufficient food for the population, keeping and breeding rabbits was imposed on everyone. The rodents were allotted, for instance, to hospitals and to typists, to corporations and to housewives, to book-keepers, to all and sundry, even to the persecuted clergy. Refusal was out of the question, as this would constitute the ‘sabotage of a Soviet undertaking’. Rabbits were colonised in thousands in already overcrowded Moscow apartments and, of course, every one of them perished. The same thing happened in every other part of the country. Just when the rabbit mania was beginning to die down, I happened to have the opportunity of inspecting a huge rabbit farm near Moscow. This was a model farm, with abundant food, but the rabbits remained chaste and showed no inclination to multiply. Later, it transpired that, because of deliberate sabotage, or just plain stupidity, the buyers of the rabbits had shown no concern for the question of sex; and among the 7,000

imported Belgian rabbits on the farm I have mentioned, only a score were female. However, this fact naturally would not become public property, and the strange tale of the rabbit monastery remained veiled in mystery. At present, rabbits are no longer mentioned. Only a score of anecdotes, mostly unprintable, remain to commemorate the rabbit craze.

### *The Primrose Path*

The path of an administrative 'enthusiast' is by no means one of roses. The peasant usually, and most other people frequently, are ready to crack the skull of the Activist. Above each Activist there stands a superior Activist from whom additional unpleasantness may be expected.

Here is an incident, culled from the official Soviet paper *Pravda*. A gramophone factory produced a record of the well-known song 'There was a King in Thule'. After considerable discussion, the factory administration decided that the word 'King' was objectionable and substituted the phrase 'old man'. Whereupon the entire staff was discharged by order of the Commissar for Education, Bubnov.

Here was no laughing matter. If the administration had not made the change, it would very likely have been summoned to appear before Commissar Yagoda, of the G.P.U., instead of Bubnov. It was probably better to be discharged than to risk getting into the hands of the G.P.U. The factory manager was by no means a fool. The problem, whether in Moscow, or more acutely in the provinces, is to hit the mark exactly; yet what the exact mark is nobody knows.

The difficulty lies principally in the fact that the

Activists are mostly stupid and illiterate and that the instructions they receive from above are no less so. The only instructions which are of clear import are those issued verbally along party lines. For instance, the Activist may be instructed either to 'liquidate' an undesirable candidate or to kill a motion considered contrary to party policy. How to determine what motions are or are not admissible is a problem for the Activist to solve.

A further difficulty is that an order originally issued by Stalin in Moscow is subject to several changes on its way down to the masses; and is likely to be interpreted, finally, in conformity with local conditions, irrespective of its original intention.

An order may pass through the executive committees or the factory trusts or the party committees or even the G.P.U. All these various institutions may eventually engage in a bitter controversy as to what the order really meant originally and what should be done about it.

An example of what may happen in these circumstances is provided by the following instance. Stalin issued a direct order for the complete ruin of the kulaks of Southern Russia, where these were in the majority. The order, after transmission through various agencies, was finally burned, after reading. I myself saw a copy signed by Andreiev, Secretary of the Regional Party Committee, in the hands of one of the local secretaries who was wise enough not to burn it.

As a result, the Communist Activists rushed at the Don and Kuban peasants with all the delirium of a pogrom and with the most appalling results. Subsequently, the army itself revolted, a retreat was ordered, and Stalin, to save his face, condemned the conduct of the 'Active'.

Thereupon the peasants cut the Activists to pieces, while the G.P.U. shot or exiled the most odious leaders.

The sapient secretary who had failed to burn the signed order showed further wisdom by giving it, for safe keeping, to another. When he was called before the G.P.U., he stated that if he were punished, he had made provision for the original document to reach the highest Government and Party heads. As the recognition of his foresight, he received a post in middle Asia. Few of the Activists are equally wise, or equally fortunate. The 'Communist power' does not stand on ceremony with the Activists any more than with anyone else. The Activist has no road open for escape. When he loses his official position and surrenders his traditional *automatic*, he is marked for slaughter without appreciable delay.

### *The Odour of Sanctity*

The Activist, torn from his social base, ready to betray his own mother to the G.P.U. and with his soul in pawn to the devil, pursues his career without conspicuous reward. He is at the same time executioner and victim, in a merciless system which leaves him tired, enervated, stupefied, and without any adequate recompense.

The Soviet power does not like to pay. An occasional able specialist may exist without stealing and without fear of starvation, but the Activist has no choice but theft. So he steals, on a beggarly Soviet scale, say a pound of meat and a bottle of vodka. Witness the following typical example.

Ivan is chairman of a kolkhoz; Stepan is a policeman; and Peter manages a booth for the State liquor monopoly. Ivan 'dekulakises' a peasant's pig, and delivers it to the police. In this he has acted quite lawfully, and has not,

as might have been expected, kept it for himself. Stepan slaughters the pig, and sends half to the meat collectors, gives Ivan, in compensation for his services, another part, and sends the rest, in the hope of further favours, to Peter. Peter, in return, supplies both of them with vodka, being covered by an account which states that so many bottles of vodka were brought from the spirit warehouse to the booth in the cart belonging to the kolkhoz, but on account of the poor quality of the material in the axles made by the Russian Farm Machine Industry, the cart was upset, and so and so many bottles of vodka broken. The broken bottles are then returned to the State spirit warehouse. This account will be signed by the chairman of the kolkhoz, the chief of police, and the local manager of the spirit monopoly. As correct official documents, no one could dispute their stated facts except the local people, and they will not dare to complain. If anyone dared to denounce Peter, his friends in the G.P.U. could be depended upon to avenge themselves thoroughly on the denunciator.

Petty larceny such as this is of no serious consequence to the economic situation, even in the midst of the general misery in the Soviets. But it is likely to extend to much greater proportions in many instances. For example, I was once called to inspect a meat warehouse where about 135 tons of smoked meat had been stored. While I dared not use the information, I learned that the greater part of this meat had been unofficially removed and the rest left to rot in order to conceal the theft. As the meat decayed, the ensuing stench was so great as to make it impossible to approach nearer than within half a mile of the warehouse. Under these conditions, the alleged 135 tons of meat were condemned and ordered to be buried.

Enough declarations were then signed by all the interested Peters and Stepan to satisfy the Revision Committee, and the peasants were called out to dig a pit to bury all this putrefaction. To complete the picturesqueness of the proceedings, I might add that all this meat had originated with pigs 'dekulakised' from the peasants, and slaughtered by the Activists. About a month after this fragrant event, half of the local Activists were themselves slaughtered by the peasants and the remainder fled.

### *Winner Take All*

Under this present régime, the three important factors are the 'Party', the 'Active', and the 'Intelligentsia'. The Party, which is also the Government, stands for political absolutism and economic serfdom. Concurrently, the 'Tops' brag of being cultured and advanced gentlemen, who 'are surpassing the world in all branches of art and industry'. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the Revolution, a State-planned destruction of the 'Bourgeois Intelligentsia' took place on a scale so vast that only a small section of this class was left alive. The new Proletarian Intelligentsia became even more counter-revolutionary than the old Intelligentsia, while they were, at the same time, less conspicuously cultured. Nevertheless, they were indispensable as doctors, engineers, pedagogues, etc. Owing to their comparatively few numbers, their value increased in accordance with the law of supply and demand. Naturally, the Activists think themselves the salt of the earth and the hope of the Revolution for which they had shed their blood. They keenly resented the presentation of plums to the Intelligentsia. However, with a limited number of plums to present, and the

necessity of keeping the Intelligentsia contented, the Activists get the worst of it.

Under these circumstances the 'Active' carries out, with particular pleasure, its obligation of spying on the Intelligentsia. With all this, the results are not strikingly successful, for the Intelligentsia utilise their superior brains to befool the Activist to the top of his bent. None the less, the war between the Intelligentsia and the 'Active' continues with accusation and counter-accusation of every possible kind—continues without cessation until the public is completely bewildered by this recriminatory conflict. The Activist must continue spying, since nothing upsets the present precarious equilibrium so much as for people to have ideas in their heads or the masses to have arms in their hands. The arms can be taken away, but how can anyone search out and take away dangerous ideas?

### *The Mechanism of Power*

The Soviet system must be recognised as an unrivalled triumph of the 'technique of power'. No other autocracy in history has set forth such grandiose plans and in the endeavour to attain them piled up so many corpses and remained unshaken.

In 1918, during the German occupation of Kiev, I still believed that the success of government, in the last analysis, was dependent upon the sympathy of the masses. When I discussed my views with Manouilsky, later general secretary of Comintern, then the representative of Red Moscow, he smiled scornfully. "What the devil do we care for the sympathy of the masses! We need the machinery of power; we shall get it and we shall keep it! The sympathy of the masses! We spit on their sympathy!"

Years later I came to realise that the Soviet Govern-

ment had indeed acquired the complete command of power. When I asked myself how this could have been gained, the only possible answer was that such power must have been built up through the homogeneity of 'Svolochs', and would thus be irresistible, since 'Svolochs' have no ideas, no doubts, no regrets, no pity. There is your definition of the Soviet 'Active'.

The 'Svoloch', or son of a bitch, is a world type, with the brains of a sheep, the jaws of a wolf, and the moral feeling of a fragment of primitive protoplasm. The success of Bolshevism has been achieved by staking its all on the Svoloch or 'Active'.

*Enter Starodubtsev*

I am sitting on my office chair, a block of birch wood, with stacks of personal dossiers scattered about the floor, while I try to make head or tail of them, in terms of Nasiedkin's phrase 'what is what'. A tall, sinewy man with a bony, dissipated face enters and looks disdainfully at my occupation. He wears a Red Army helmet but without the star, and a military coat devoid of decorations, indicating that while a prisoner he still has some privileges. As he enters the last cubbyhole, I hear his harsh voice: "These sons of bitches at Pogra have sent us another professor?"

"No, he is a legal adviser," answers a servile voice.

"It is all the same. We will show him the university here, and shove his spectacles up his backside. Tverdun, connect me with Freudenberg."

"Immediately, Comrade Starodubtsev."

Freudenberg is an Ukrainian professor of mathematics and has, therefore, been given the position of 'statistician', which has nothing to do with statistics. His duties, for



which he is in no way suited, are to divide up and sort out the man power of two or three barracks of U.R.CH.; assign them to work and account for the full utilisation of the time of all those left alive.

"Comrade Starodubtsev, Freudenberg is at the 'phone."

"Freudenberg? Starodubtsev speaking. How many times have I told you, you son of a bitch, that you should not send these bespectacled idiots over here! What? Whose orders? I spit on his orders. I give you my orders as Chief of the division. See that you obey them or I will throw you and all your bespectacled nincompoops into the middle of next week. We are not running a university here. Shut up, devil take you! The next thing you know you will be in the camp jail. Seven of your men failed to turn up for work yesterday. Where were they? I spit on their illness. Everyone must be in his place for work. What? First learn how to swear properly, then you can speak with authority. What? You have no armed guards? If everyone does not turn up to-morrow——!"

While I listen to this tirade, interspersed with all sorts of unprintable profanity, my personal dossiers go quite out of my head. Who is this Starodubtsev, how far does his authority extend and what are his functions? Professors? I have just heard how one speaks to them. Two of them work here at U.R.CH., scrubbing the floors and taking care of the privies. One professor of 'reflexology' works ten to fifteen hours daily stamping personal cards!

Professor of 'reflexology'! Psychology is no longer in existence in the U.S.S.R. any more than the soul. I remember once mentioning Freudism to him. "Freudism?" asked the professor. "What is that? Some new deviation?" The professor was one of the half-baked Soviet Intelligentsia. No, as a support I cannot depend

on the professors. I must conclude that I am here because someone higher up, probably a Chekist, needs me. If that is so, I can whistle at Starodubtsev sooner or later. If it is not so, then at the worst I may be sent out into the forest to work. In any case, I must put down any attempts by the Activists to bite me in the calf. My theory of the Soviet is that if you do not foil the gang at the beginning, they will tear you to pieces. The Activists are worse than the Urks, for the Urks are much more intelligent. An Urk will begin playing with his knife only in his own interest, while the Activist will spring at your throat for no reason whatever simply out of class hatred. That evening I passed by Starodubtsev's desk.

"Hey, you. What is your name? Are you also a professor?"

"My name is Solonevich. I am not a professor."

"So I thought. Idiots do not get along well here."

"But still not everyone is an idiot. As far as I can see, you have fixed things very comfortably for yourself."

Someone laughed behind us and Starodubtsev rose to his feet. I took pains to indicate through my attitude and expression my readiness to smash his face. Had I done so, it would, no doubt, have procured me several weeks of Camp jail and a similar period in the hospital for him. Since he appeared unprepared for the situation, I took the matter in my own hands and said: "I don't know your official position, but I may as well tell you beforehand, that if you should ever allow yourself to speak to me as you did to Professor Freudenberg, the matter would not end well for you."

As I turned away, I heard his remark: "You just wait." This was followed by a string of obscenities to which I paid no attention.

That same evening I overheard a dialogue in the next room: "Comrade Starodubtsev, what is an ichthyologist?"

"An ichthyologist is a fish of the period before the flood. It no longer exists."

"Doesn't exist? Then why does Medgora ask us how many ichthyologists we have on our register?"

"There you have it, these idiots with university diplomas!" Here Starodubtsev raises his voice so that I may be sure to hear him. "It is really remarkable—when one has a higher education, one is necessarily an idiot. Write them that at U.R.CH. we have no antediluvian fish at their disposal."

To my dismay, I suddenly heard Yura's voice: "That is not a fish, Comrade Starodubtsev, but a scientist who makes a study of fish."

"What's that to do with you? You don't need to open your mouth until you're asked! Devil take you! I will teach you how to speak before you are spoken to. What will we come to if every son of a bitch butts in?"

Yura continued in a stammering, excited voice: "Pardon me. I will have to report the matter to the Chief of the U.R.CH. If your remarks about antediluvian fish should reach Medgora, the Chief also would be likely to be involved in the resulting unpleasantness."

Bravo, Yura! Well done! But how long can we keep up this sort of thing?

We had been assigned a tent with electric light and which was watertight, but with a temperature of only 15-20 degrees Fahrenheit. On our way there that night Yura was much depressed. "I think, Dad, that we had better disappear before they tear us to pieces. To-day I

saw Starodubtsev drop his cigarette on the floor and then call Professor M. from the next room to pick it up for him. Devil take it, we had better join the Urks or go into the forest."

I felt much the same, but I had no idea how much more the U.R.CH. had in store for us, nor how many months we were to remain there. However, I had underestimated Starodubtsev's capacity—he nearly put me before a firing squad. How could we anticipate what nightmare weeks we should experience during the dispatch of the transport trains from Podporozhie to B.A.M.—weeks immeasurably more trying than Shpalerka, solitary confinement, and the expectation of being shot? Yet had we not landed in U.R.CH., we should quite likely never have escaped alive.

### *The Chief of U.R.CH.*

The next day I received a summons to the Chief of U.R.C.H., Comrade Bogoyavlenski, an old Chekist. Better a Chekist than an Activist-Svoloch.

I enter a small office furnished with a dilapidated and neglected desk, at which sits a man in a G.P.U. uniform, inspecting my dossier. Bogoyavlenski measured me with a grim Chekist glance, and began the customary meaningless tirade, full of the usual phrases about 'Camp discipline', 'immediate arrest', 'solitary confinement', 'Bolshevist tempo of labour', 'necessary shock work', and the like.

This tirade acted like balm to my wounds, no doubt an opposite result to that intended. I drew the conclusion that my paragraphs cut no particular ice in his eyes, that he was either ignorant of my conversation with Starodubtsev or attached no importance to it, and finally, that

he had the same brilliant idea of my functions as had been expressed by Nasiedkin's 'what is what'.

"Citizen Chief, will you allow me to tell you that your warning is unnecessary?"

"What do you mean by unnecessary?"

"Quite simple. Once in Camp, it is to my own interest to become a worthy co-worker, since the matter no longer rests with me."

"With whom does it rest, according to your idea?"

"Citizen Chief, there will be 25,000 to 30,000 people in Pogra, and 15,000 to 20,000 more in the whole department within a week or two. You certainly understand that an account will have to be given by U.R.C.H. as well as by myself."

"You needn't worry about the matter of responsibility. We shan't stand on ceremony."

"That is clear enough. But the question is how, with our prison equipment, can we divide and take care of these 40,000 men and put them to work? Devil take it, it will be a fine example of confusion and tangle."

"True, our apparatus is not of the best. Where did you work when you were at liberty?"

I gave him a brief but comprehensive autobiography.

"Why are you standing? Take a seat."

"If you will allow me, Citizen Chief, the principal question seems to me to be the qualifications of our lower subordinate units in the barracks, columns, etc. It will be necessary to organise short educational courses."

"Yes, courses would not be bad; but who would give the lectures?"

"I can. But Medgora must help, too. In fact, our department is a shock department."

"Yes, we must think this over carefully. Meanwhile, have a cigarette."

"Thank you, but I prefer my own." My wonder-working packet of Troika cigarettes come on the scene again. Bogoyavlenski looked at me with astonishment. I offered the packet to him: "If you please."

He took a cigarette: "How in the world do you people in Camp get such cigarettes?"

"Friends in Moscow send them to us. They are registered in Distribution Warehouse /1, but they don't themselves smoke."

Distribution /1 is the Distribution point of the Government for People's Commissars and other high officials, as Bogoyavlenski most certainly knew. After about twenty minutes we parted, but on very different terms than those on which we had come together.

### *A System of Pitiless Intelligence*

The working conditions in Camp are, like everything else under the G.P.U., carefully thought out. The prisoner is expected to buckle to and saw seven and one-half cubic metres of wood daily, or perform an equivalent amount of other labour. The daily task is standardised and is printed in the task book issued to each prisoner. Moreover, food is allotted strictly in accordance with the amount of work performed. If half the task is finished, the prisoner should receive two pounds of bread; if not, he is given a smaller quantity. The total amount of work allotted regulates the complete supply of rations. If there is a deficiency in the sum total, each prisoner receives less. It must be realised that there is no other food but bread, that the food allowance of two pounds of bread is, in this Arctic climate, tantamount to under-nourish-

ment, while one pound means semi-starvation and one half-pound spells death. U.R.CH. reports the number of men employed, the production department estimates the quantity and quality of the work, and the supply department issues an order on the G.P.U. Warehouse to deliver a quantity of bread in proportion to production.

As a matter of fact, the tasks are, for many reasons, never fully accomplished. This is due to the exhausted state of the prisoners, defective tools, and the large number of shirkers, chiefly Urks. The intellectuals in charge constantly manipulate and falsify the figures to increase the apparent efficiency of the workers and thus help to keep the Camp from starvation. With the help of our adjustments, we manage to preserve our people from extinction.

What is called ‘/3’ at Pogra means digging. When digging is confined to normal soil, progress is fair. When, however, the men have to contend with wet and almost liquid sand, it is physically impossible to complete the prescribed task. In consequence, the curve of food supply falls with the curve of production, the men become weakened with hunger, and soon perish.

From the standpoint of common sense, the tasks should be periodically revised, but this can only be done by the Camp administrators and with the consent of G.U.L.A.G. In general, in the cases of ‘career /3’ these are made only when the strength of the personnel has become so impaired that most of the labourers have to be sent into the division of ‘weak strength’, where they are given a pound and a half of bread daily and do only light work without any prescribed task. As a rule, the average prisoners will be sent into the ‘weak strength’ division about three times during their Camp existence. Recovery

becomes slower after each visit, and only the strongest survive the third. The Intelligentsia in Camp do their utmost to keep prisoners from starvation, sometimes even with the help of local chiefs, and the results are, occasionally, arrest and deportation to the Solovetsky Islands.

As an example of the pitilessness of this system, Boris estimated that out of the original 2,000 men in the brigade of 'earth labour' (career '3'), 1,600 eventually died. The system, unfortunately, is as rational as it is pitiless, and to combat it is impossible. It also includes occasional executions, but in the Baltic Camp I do not think more than 25 to 30 were shot daily.

### *The Activists and the System*

The intervention of the Activists in the life of the Camp causes innumerable greater losses than the interferences of the G.P.U. This intervention may be grouped under three headings: lack of co-ordination, ignorance, and inanity.

### *Lack of Co-ordination.*

The Camp system for employment of man power is cruel in the extreme. The new arrivals enter first into quarantine, where each man receives a pound and a half of bread daily and where there is no systematically organised work. The stay of the prisoners in quarantine and other distributing centres is considered a 'leakage' of man power. Tens of thousands of prisoners who have not yet recovered from prison famine, and are scarcely able to drag themselves along, are assigned to forest work and other hard labour immediately. Unfortunately, they are unable to do anything, as supplies are deficient; there is no suitable clothing, and none is forthcoming, nor are



there available sufficient tools of various kinds. Thus the poor wretches are driven to work waist-deep in snow at a temperature not above 10 degrees Fahrenheit in the clothing in which they were arrested, and without tools. Obviously in the absence of tools, the prescribed tasks are impossible of fulfilment, and so little food would consequently be issued that the personnel would nearly starve.

All these matters were under the control of Starodubtsev, and in his person U.R.Ch. fulfilled its task an hundred fold. He provided 'man power'. What becomes of this man power is not his, nor anyone else's business. The production department must extricate itself from its tangles as best it can, with the result that its engineers search madly around trying to scrounge tools wherever they can, and begging for the cessation of this stream of prisoners who cannot be utilised. I was finally to discuss this difficulty with Bogoyavlenski—not that of the perishing men, for which he cares nothing—but I urged that if the stream of arriving prisoners was not arrested, half the camp would be reduced to weak strength division from lack of food within a few weeks, and for this he would be mercilessly assailed by G.U.L.A.G. In consequence of my intervention, the influx was stopped, and I thus came into my first business conflict with Starodubtsev.

### *Ignorance.*

As an instance of the deplorable results of ignorance, it will be sufficient to cite a typical case. The 'Nivastroi' water-power station requisitioned 850 carpenters from our department. For this purpose we were accustomed to send peasants, as they are all familiar with this kind of work. In this particular case, unfortunately, there were

included 140 Uzbeks, registered as peasants; the Activists of U.R.Ch., of course, having no idea that these men came from the arid and timberless deserts of middle Asia, and could, therefore, know nothing of carpentry. In consequence, they would be useless as man power, and would, therefore, be rationed to between one half to one pound of bread daily. This, to inhabitants of a hot, dry climate suddenly transferred to the polar zone, would be the equivalent of early death.

*Inanity.*

Every Soviet Chief, on the occasion of a breakdown, resorts at once to blasphemies and obscenities, rather than to thought. In our case the brigadiers, the statisticians, and the chiefs of columns, besides the Chief of the Camp unit, had all exhausted their vocabularies before the matter came before Starodubtsev. Thereupon, for several days in succession, Starodubtsev poured into the telephone repeatedly a volley of unprintable abuse of the Chiefs of the third Camp unit. While it was clear enough that this obscenity would hardly help matters, his bombardment continued for five days. Eventually, I was summoned by Bogoyavlenski, with whom, by this time, I had established quite cordial 'business relations'.

"Look here," said Bogoyavlenski, "can you disentangle this devilry for me? According to reports, the third unit fulfils its functions almost entirely, but these imbeciles in the 'Production Section' show only 25 per cent efficiency. What's wrong?"

I promised Bogoyavlenski a full report at the earliest possible moment, and then proceeded to dig into a stack of statistical 'Summaries', so massive that one hundred of them could cover a good-sized German Principality.

The first one I investigated dealt with the question

of horses. I accordingly proceeded to telephone the Veterinary Section.

"What's wrong with you and your horses?"

"Speaking briefly, the whole situation is lousy."

"That tells me nothing. What's the trouble with the horses?"

"The fact is that the horses don't work."

"Why don't they work?"

"If I may say so, nearly all of them are dead."

"Why did they die?"

"Because again, if you will allow me to say so, of the 'tree-top ensilage'. In the autumn we filled the silo with twigs. The horses could not eat the twigs and nearly all of them have died."

"How then did you transport the wood?"

"As a matter of fact, we have harnessed the prisoners instead of the horses, and are using 'man power'."

The campaign for feeding horses and cattle with ensilage made of twigs had already collapsed in the Soviet Union at large while I was still free. As a result of the dekulakising and collectivisation, not only oats, but even grass had ceased to be cultivated. Thereupon, it was proven officially that the small branches of pine and fir trees were remarkably rich in calories and vitamins, and the 'power' began to inculcate the idea of 'twig fodder'. The question as to whether the horses and cattle would eat it never occurred to them. However, as in the case of the famous rabbits, whoever protested was sent to a Concentration Camp. The kolkhoz peasants wandered sadly through the forests, cutting off twigs, which were subsequently crammed into the silo. The same process was now going on in Camp. As long as there was a little hay left, the poor horses managed to exist somehow, but

when they were restricted to 100 per cent tree fodder they died off.

The Chiefs of the Camp unit were in no hurry to send in reports concerning the pine-tree ensilage. While not responsible for the experiment, they would, none the less, very likely be held answerable for its failure. In any event, the lower ranks of the Activists would suffer as usual.

Despite reduction in the amount of tasks because of the breakdown in transportation by man power, which had been foreseen, and despite an extension of juggling of figures by the Intelligentsia, the food supply began to decrease in proportion to the lessened production. As a result, the encampment began to move steadily into the 'weak strength' division. Owing to the delay due to red tape and obstruction by the Activists, this process was unduly prolonged, with the result that the death list had already become alarming before I became aware of the ensilage farce.

When I visited Bogoyavlenski to make my report, Starodubtsev rushed after me. Bogoyavlenski said angrily to Starodubtsev: "Over two weeks have passed without your being able to trace the trouble. You call yourself a co-worker. May the devil take you, you son of a bitch. I'll put you in solitary for a month."

But he did not make good his threat, as Starodubtsev was considered an indispensable specialist in U.R.C.H. matters. A special telegram, couched in the most tragic terms, was addressed to Medgora, asking for a special supply of food for the third unit in view of the prevailing epidemic. Three days later came the reply: "Search out the guilty and inflict the severest punishment." All the Activists of the third unit were let loose upon the unfor-

tunate veterinary surgeons, stable-men, and carters. But no one paid the slightest attention to the few remaining horses or to the utilisation of the pine-tree ensilage in the other Camp units. Meanwhile, the working strength of the third unit had been reduced to a bare 5,000 men.

Apart from such mass measures, the Activists continued the specific plundering of prisoners by means of bribery. For instance, a quart of vodka would suffice to prevent one being sent to 'Nivastroi'. This same quart of vodka represents four or five months' wages of a wood-cutter engaged in hard labour. Nevertheless, it is better to deprive oneself of sugar and the makhorka which might have been bought in the Camp co-operative for a few months than go to 'Nivastroi'. Tricks such as this, and others equally detestable, are at all times characteristic of the Activists. In the event of a collapse of the Soviet power, millions of these Activists would be cut into pieces, and, while I am not a blood-thirsty man, I feel that they would richly deserve their fate.

### *Causes of Imprisonment*

While I never actually functioned as economist-planner, I did discover some opportunities of usefulness in my position as legal adviser. I could at least try to render judicial help to the Camp population, though naturally the Camp Chiefs looked very unfavourably on any attempts to help the unfortunate prisoners.

"What do you want to do, help the kulaks to get out of Camp?"

I declared this to be one of my duties according to instructions from G.U.L.A.G. Bogoyavlenski had never read these instructions; neither had I: and in all likelihood they did not exist, but at least they sounded imposing.

From the big batch of dossiers in my possession, there emanated strong odours of oppression and illiteracy, between the shrewd callousness of the G.P.U. and the intemperate zeal of the Activists. With the dossiers coming from the G.P.U. there was, of course, nothing to be done, even though many of them were wickedly absurd and unjust. For instance, a peasant was sentenced to ten years for stealing three potatoes from a kolkhoz field; in another instance there was a conviction for 'sabotaging the introduction of twig fodder'. In a further case, a peasant was sentenced to ten years for 'bandit assault' on a kolkhoz train of carts, despite the fact that a hospital certificate included in his dossier made it clear that during the month previous to the alleged assault, and for six weeks afterwards, the peasant was confined to the hospital suffering from typhus. In this last case I decided to call the man to U.R.CH. for personal examination, despite the furious opposition of the Activists on the ground that I was disorganising labour discipline and man power. When the man appeared, he explained that he had, of course, known absolutely nothing about the assault, but that he and the secretary of the village Soviet had been rivals for the favours of a certain kolkhoz maiden.

### *The Activists at My Throat*

As I continued the investigation among my papers, I came across all kinds of extraordinary cases; continually people were apparently being arrested while away from home for lack of some particular paper, and sent to the nearest Camp 'for examination'. Once in Camp, it was, of course, impossible to present proofs; and the chances were that the individual so summoned would never be

released from Camp afterwards. Meanwhile, their families would have their passports taken away from them and their food-cards would be stopped without appeal. Many such cases had actually been inquired into, in our own Camp, months previously, and should long since have been sent by Starodubtsev to Medgora. Naturally, my investigations were annoying Starodubtsev, and he sought opportunities for reprisal. One or two small tactical errors on my own part left me open to attack, whereupon I was presently informed that Starodubtsev had sent a denunciation to the Camp G.P.U., charging me with 'counter-revolutionary sabotage' in stealing from his desk and burning in the office stove seventy-two dossiers of prisoners who should have been released. His complaint was backed up by the affidavits of half a dozen subordinate Activists. Seldom in my life have I been so near to being stood up 'against the wall'.

Bogoyavlenski had found some of my activities inconvenient, and further, in case information of my alleged offence reached Medgora, he would be asked why he had put this work, despite all instructions to the contrary, into the hands of a counter-revolutionary. In such a dilemma he would naturally at once surrender me to Medgora for punishment.

While the accusations against me were quite absurd, I was given no opportunity to ascertain the details of the charge, nor would much consideration be given to my defence.

I could see just one slight gleam of hope, as five days had elapsed and still I had not been arrested. Boris tried to elicit some particulars from the Chief of the Third Division, who was in his hands for treatment, but failed. Yura displayed a strange medley of optimism and pessi-

mism. He thought that my chances of escape were small, but an attempt must be made. Above all, he set his hopes on what was known in our family as 'Spiegel'.

The original 'Spiegel' was a young Jew, to whom I had been able to render a small service, without ever having seen him. He was an employee of the Cheka, and, at a later date, when my wife, Yura, and myself were confined in the Cheka prison at Odessa, with every prospect of being shot, 'Spiegel' took advantage of an opportunity to steal all the documents in our dossiers. The sequel to this service was that we were discharged in default of evidence.

Several times afterwards, when everything appeared utterly hopeless, some form of 'Spiegel' would arrive at just the right moment. On this occasion, also, something similar occurred.

### *Comrade Yakimenko and the First 'Khalturas'*

I passed the next few days alternating between the extremes of hope and despair. I realised that I had rather foolishly departed from the well-proved practice pursued during years of Soviet experience, of making a definite choice between alternatives, and then sticking to the chosen path. In this case I should never have turned my back on the 'khaltura', without which I would be as vulnerable as a medieval knight without his armour.

Despite the fact that the 'promfinplan' had long since been completed, more and more transport trains continued to arrive in Podporozhie. By mid-February some 45,000 convicts were confined in this section, while unimaginable chaos reigned in the U.R.C.H. With a shortage of tools, thousands of prisoners were unable to work, and were therefore short of food. All the lists were



so hopelessly muddled that no one knew, with any degree of certainty, how many people were located in each place; in consequence, some settlements received double rations and others none. The U.R.Ch. was overwhelmed by an avalanche of personal dossiers, cards, service-lists, and other documents applying to 45,000 living human beings, all headed for disaster.

All these aggregations of men and their records had been hopelessly confused by stupid and incapable statisticians and foolish chiefs of the columns. Thousands of unnamed prisoners, divorced from their documents, wandered aimlessly in hungry crowds through the quarantine and labour-distributing headquarters. Hundreds of petty chiefs flew about to different barracks, striving to gather together their scattered herds.

It had begun to thaw, and with many of the barracks having leaky roofs the pandemonium was intensified by the overcrowding of those which were tolerably waterproof and the desertion of the others. Towards the end of February such a state of utter chaos had been reached, that it was necessary for the Chief of the U.R.O. (Accounting-Distributing Department of the Main Administration) to come over from Medgora for the purpose of trying to restore order. All manner of legends circulated about this all-mighty Pasha, as about any official who had power to issue death sentences, which, with the customary exaggerations and embellishments of the Activists, had grown to amazing recitals.

At the close of our daily work we gathered about 2 a.m. in Bogoyavlenski's office. At his desk sat a tall man of patrician appearance, hard, dictatorial, clean-shaven, and dressed in a dandified Chekist's overcoat. With un-

concealed dislike, he looked about him at the ragged, hungry, thievish horde of Activists who were crowding the room. His well-fed features grimaced in cold disgust at the necessity of breathing the same air with these ragged yet indispensable associates of his official labours. This was the Chief of the U.R.O., Comrade Yakimenko.

"Well, what's the matter with you? Get together quickly and sit down."

As there was nothing to sit on, everybody hustled about for logs, planks, tables, and chairs.

Yakimenko's speech was one of the roughest that I have ever heard in the Soviets. It did not even begin with 'Comrades' or 'Citizens'. The gist of his address was that shock tempo was necessary and no one needed to think that he could evade appointed labour or leave the Camp in any way, except by release at the end of his sentence or the grave. Bogoyavlenski followed with some remarks along the same lines, perhaps a shade less dictatorial and brutal. No one else said a word. The great man looked around contemptuously and in a threatening tone said: "Well?" Starodubtsev began with a medley of meaningless sentences, full of the cant Soviet passwords, none of which made sense, and after several minutes ran down and stopped. Yakimenko asked:

"Have you finished?"

Starodubtsev replied: "Yes."

Yakimenko continued: "Well? Who else wishes to speak? Has nobody anything to say?"

Nasiedkin cleared his throat.

"If you allow me, I have a concrete suggestion for initiating the Socialist competition between the U.R.CH. and the Red Banner Waterworks Project." Yakimenko nodded assent.

Nasiedkin read endlessly. . . . Oh Lord! what a pitiable provincial dated 'khaltura' this! Finally he stops.

Again an imperious "Well?" from Yakimenko.

"Will you allow me, Citizen Chief?"

I begin. "As a newcomer, I hesitate at concrete suggestions, after only a few weeks in Camp. But, on the other hand, having been recently at liberty, I am familiar with the new forms of Socialist organisation, confirmed by the experience of millions of shock-workers at Dnieprostroi, Magnitostroi, and thousands of other proletarian projects, not to mention the experience of hundreds of thousands who have given their lives to these projects. Therefore, I find it necessary to define more closely the interesting suggestion given us as a basis by Comrade Nasiedkin."

I was lounging on a window-sill while I delivered the above opening and barely raised my head. With the Soviet chiefs one must never be too respectful and behind the seeming correctness, which it is advisable to assume, it is necessary to suggest: "That, properly speaking, I spit on you, being able to dispense with your help." One must, in other words, suggest that one has 'pull' and of sufficient strength by which even the Soviet chiefs are likely to be intimidated.

When I raised my head, I could read in Starodubtsev's eyes: "Go on, you haven't much time now to talk nonsense." Yakimenko, however, gave me an encouraging glance, and I continued with a string of the accepted Soviet slogans: 'Preciseness of the paragraphs', 'Co-efficient of fulfilment', 'Control troikas', 'Promotion of the best shock-workers' etc., None of these, of course, make sense, and yet I notice on Yakimenko's slightly sneering face a glimmer of interest.

I proceeded to outline a series of suggestions to the effect that the experienced men in Camp, including Comrade Starodubtsev, should all give a few hours of work (besides our regular eighteen hours daily) to instruct the newer arrivals and create an organisation capable of coping with the difficulties. Feeling that if I continued much longer, since I really had nothing to say, I would soon be burbling utter nonsense, I ceased.

"Have you finished, Comrade . . . ?" asked Yakimenko.

"Solonevich," supplied Bogoyavlenski.

"Yes, Citizen Chief."

"Well . . . that's something to work on at least. I suggest a commission, including Solonevich, Nasiedkin . . . let me see, yes, perhaps Starodubtsev, to thresh out the details. Term—two days. As it is now four o'clock, let's adjourn."

We file out. As I cross the snowy yard, I feel dizzy and my legs threaten to give way under me. I am hungry, but there is nothing to eat. But, in spite of my weakness, I feel that I have gained something through the meeting.

### *'Spiegel' to the Rescue*

The following day, I am sitting on a block of wood, with the dossiers, which control 45,000 lives, scattered all around me on shelves and on the floor. Passing by my station, Starodubtsev knocks against my stool with demonstrative negligence, so that all the dossiers are scattered about the floor. I spring to my feet with a resolute determination to smash Comrade Starodubtsev's jaw. I am deterred from this Christian resolution just in time by hearing Yakimenko's voice:

"So this is where you are?"

I turn towards him.

"I have been looking for you in all the U.R.CH. nooks and corners, and you're not such a little fellow as all that! But why the devil have you hidden yourself in this place?"

"This," I reply ironically, "is the Judicial and Planning Economical section."

"The deuce it is. How is it you couldn't find a table?"

"All the tables were in use when I came."

Yakimenko glances understandingly at the overturned stool, the scattered papers, the mutual attitudes and expressions of Starodubtsev and myself.

"Tell Bogoyavlenski that I order him to find you a decent place in which to work, a chair and a table; and, as I want to speak to you about various matters now, let's go to my quarters for the time being."

"Immediately I have picked up these papers from the floor."

"Never mind that. Starodubtsev can do it. Pick them up, Starodubtsev."

Yakimenko and I left as Starodubtsev, his face distorted by rage, began to gather up the papers.

"I have heard your name somewhere before," says Yakimenko. "Have you ever written books about tours and touring?"

"Yes, I have."

"So we are vocational allies. This year I intend to go to Svanetia."

"That's a beautiful country."

"Did you go there from the North? Through Dongus-Orun?"

As we walked along, chatting, we met the Chief of the Third Division. He stops, and salutes.

"Be so kind as to send my car at six o'clock," says Yakimenko. "By the way, are you acquainted?"

The Chief of the Third Division hesitates.

"No? . . . Then allow me to introduce our well-known tourist promoter, Comrade Solonevich."

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Comrade Nepomniashchi."

Comrade Nepomniashchi salutes, and extends to me a hand which intends, at a later date, to push me 'against the wall'. Nevertheless, I shake hands.

"We must convene a meeting of our Activists, and Comrade Solonevich can lecture about excursions in the Caucasus."

"It would be a pleasure to listen," says the Chief of the Third Division.

I review the little comedy with mixed feelings.

Arriving at Yakimenko's quarters, we enter a large clean room. Yakimenko takes off his coat and remarks: "If you will excuse me, Comrade Solonevich, I will take off my shoes and lie down for a moment."

"Please do," I reply.

"I have not had a wink of sleep for the last two nights. It's a regular prison life."

Realising that this was an unfortunate expression to use in my presence, he continued: "Our whole generation lives the life of prisoners. Now, Comrade Solonevich, we must not talk about touring at the expense of our work. Tell me frankly for what offences you were sent here?"

I explain briefly.

"And your son?"

"For the same reason, and for being in my company."

"Humph! Yes, it's better to avoid foreigners; but

never mind. A cultured man who is clear-headed won't do so badly in Camp. In fact, life at liberty is not so attractive nowadays. Of course, it takes time to get used to it. After all, it is hardly likely that you will be here for the eight years in any case."

I thank him for the consoling words.

"Now let's get down to brass tacks. What is your frank opinion of the U.R.CH. organisation?"

"I have no reason for concealing my opinion, especially from you."

"Yes. But what's to be done? There's no more outside help in sight. I am relying on your assistance to get things moving. I am talking to you now with the idea of getting you to formulate the instructions for subordinates which you suggested yesterday. Suppose we do this. I will explain to you just what the work is, and what it is desired to achieve, and you draft the instructions necessary to carry it out. They will have to be brief and clear, so as to penetrate the thickest skull. If I remember rightly, you don't write badly."

I acknowledged the compliment with a bow.

"The only difficulty, Comrade Yakimenko, is that you may not be able to count on me for long, as I am accused of having stolen and burned several dozen dossiers, and I am afraid . . . !"

Yakimenko's face assumes once more a disdainful grimace.

"Oh, that! Spit on it!"

I am completely taken aback. Yesterday, I was altogether helpless, and to-day, "Spit on it!" Is it possible that this is really 'Spiegel'? The cigarette falls from my trembling hand, and I answer: "It's not so easy to 'Spit on it' under the circumstances. I am just a new man here."

"Nonsense! I know all about the affair, and it's quite clear. Starodubtsev had simply fallen so far in arrear that the only way he could devise out of the mess was to throw a heap of documents into the fire. I know him. It's all rot. I shall order the charge against you to be cancelled at once."

"May I ask you, Comrade Yakimenko, what made you decide this charge was all rot?"

"Well, you know, I have had a wide experience of people, and I find it difficult to believe that a man of your type and 'paragraphs' would think of avenging himself on any miserable Starodubtsev at such a price. Seventy dossiers would cost your fellow prisoners perhaps one hundred years' imprisonment! You must agree—it doesn't seem like you."

"You make me feel sorry that it was not you who tried my case in the G.P.U."

"G.P.U. is another matter. Will you have some tea?"

Tea, with sugar, lemon, and biscuits is brought in. After the recent vicissitudes, I feel cosy and secure as though on some fantastic upward flight.

Returning to U.R.CH. in the dark, I am halted by a sharp, almost hysterical exclamation from Yura: "It's you, Dad?"

I could read in his face and in Boris's that something very alarming has happened.

"Have you been let out, Dad?"

"Let out from where?"

"Haven't you been arrested?"

"No, my dear boy."

"What 'Svolochs'," exclaimed Yura, with a mixture of rage and relief.

"Thank God," says Boris, "he's alive, and not in the



Third Division. Starodubtsev and others in the U.R.CH. told us you had been arrested by Yakimenko himself."

"Starodubtsev told you that?"

"Yes."

I felt a desire to grasp Starodubtsev and squeeze him until I broke his backbone. What must Yura and Boris have endured during the time I was chatting with Yakimenko and drinking tea.

As they embraced me, I could see tears in Yura's eyes. We kissed each other in the solemn darkness, while an overpowering feeling of tenderness and confidence came over me. Here they are—my two nearest and dearest. It's impossible that, as long as we are together, anything can happen to us. We continue for some time our interchanges of affection and are happy, though as yet neither Boris nor Yura know of Yakimenko's recommendation to "Spit on it!"

Finally, I announce: "Now, the last report from the 'Victory Front'—Spiegel!"

"Is it really true? Word of honour?"

"Ah! be serious!" says Boris.

"I am quite in earnest." And I give them an account of the whole interview with Yakimenko.

We hug each other once more, and finally Yura, feeling completely invincible, says: "Well, you see, it's just as I predicted. Whenever things seem to be at their very worst, some 'Spiegel' always appears on the scene."

My talk with Yakimenko operated like magic. Everything was liquidated and the whole situation was restored to normal.

From now on, instead of being choked with makhorka smoke every evening, I sat in Yakimenko's rooms,

drinking tea, eating biscuits, and listening to his lectures on the subject of the Camp. Based on these facts, very few of which were new to me, I wrote the desired instructions. Yakimenko proposed to publish them for the entire W.B.C. and even suggested sending them to G.U.L.A.G. I learned later that he really did publish them, of course, under his own signature. The modest cost of his hospitality, his tea, and his biscuits had not been spent in vain.

## B.A.M. (BAIKAL-AMUR-MAIN LINE)

*Markovich Reconstructs*

About two hundred yards from the U.R.CH. stood a ramshackle old cabin which served as headquarters for the Camp newspaper, *Reconstruction*. It accommodated Markovich, the editor, Troshin, a poet, and Misha, the compositor, together with an old, clattering printing press. Whenever I could escape from the confusion of U.R.CH., I slipped through the narrow door of the hut and indulged in pleasant loafing. Here one could breathe freely away from the U.R.CH. turmoil, read the Moscow papers in peace, and savour the worldly wisdom of Markovich.

Markovich knew all the ins and outs of the Camp. He was a good-humoured Americanised Jew who had emigrated to the United States before the World War.

"If you have never seen a perfect idiot before in your life, please look at me," were his opening words.

I looked at him accordingly, but there was no hint of idiocy in the wearily cynical expression of the slight little man in front of me.

Markovich had returned from America about seven years before. "I wanted to see at least a corner of the Socialist Paradise," he continued. "How do *you* like it? Am I not an idiot after all?"

At that time he was possessed of 27,000 dollars, which he had slowly accumulated during his residence in the

United States. It goes without saying that the Soviet Customs readily exchanged them for roubles, of course at the rate of two roubles for a dollar.

"Well, you understand," he went on, "I was just a lamb to be fleeced. They gave me short change, then they taxed me and taxed me until I went to the Ministry of Finance to ask, 'How much do you mean to let me keep for myself? I'm not talking about dollars any more, just about roubles, if you like. Or shall I have to pay something more?' They just threw me out of the office. Six months later I hadn't a kopek left. A neat job—that's my idea of a fine joke—\$27,000!"

Now Markovich is in charge of 'Reconstruction.' Reconstruction is a Camp expression which connotes human rebuilding. By means of reconstruction, all kinds of delinquents are to be converted into respectable Sovietists. The Soviet Penal system is supposed to be based on the idea of Reconstruction rather than Punishment, and that compulsory labour in a Concentration Camp among criminals, while suffering from both cold and hunger, will stimulate enthusiasm for the 'Erection of the Classless Socialised Society', and that a man who has survived six or eight years' Concentration Camp hardships, without breaking down under the strain, will return to freedom ardent to labour in the good cause.

The newspaper, *Reconstruction*, even judged by Soviet standards, was, in truth, a contemptibly shabby journal. Its contents fell into two categories: enthusiasm and talebearing. The enthusiasm was supplied by Markovich himself, the talebearing was provided by a network of Camp correspondents, who were always on the look-out for scandal, such as malingering, love-affairs, treasonable conversation, drinking bouts, practise of religious rites,

refusals to work, and other misdemeanours of Camp life.

"You know, Ivan Lukianovich," said Markovich, thoughtfully gazing at his 'creation', "in a decent country a paper like this would not be thought fit for a public lavatory, if you'll excuse the expression."

"Then why don't you let it go to the devil?" said I.

"What would I do without it? After all, I must serve my appointed time. Seeing that I've somehow entered the Socialist Paradise, I'll have to play the part of a Socialist saint. This isn't America. That I know quite definitely; haven't I paid nearly \$30,000 and five years' Camp confinement for that information? And I've still five more years to serve. Why should I have to improve on Gorki? And tell me, by the way, since you've just arrived from the outside world—what sort of chap is Gorki? Still a writer?"

"A writer," I assured him.

"Then he can't be a complete scoundrel. Well, I can understand that. But, after all, I'm in a Concentration Camp. What's to be done? And you know, if you take away *Reconstruction* from Medgora, take my word for it, as sure as God's in heaven, things will be still worse. Admitted, I've forgotten how to blush, but I do take some pains to keep my *Reconstruction* from stinking too strongly. I delete a lot of talebearing that would do real harm, and besides—after all, I'm a prisoner. And Gorki? What's his position? Is he penniless? Is he a prisoner, too? After all, he's an old man, but why does he have to prostitute his talent?"

"One must assume that he really believes the stuff he writes. On your way here, didn't you still believe in these things yourself?"

"Admitted—I kept on believing for two full days!"

"Right. You believed as long as no one took your money from you. Gorki had no faith while no one gave him any cash."

"So you think it's all a question of money? Fame? Advertisement? I'm not so sure. When I began to edit this *Reconstruction*, I felt ashamed, at first, to be seen in the Camp. Then I got used to it. As to Gorki, I am ashamed of him, even to this day."

"And you're not the only one."

Into this little room of Markovich's, which contained even that unheard-of luxury, a bed, my son Yura sometimes appeared from the U.R.C.H., and sometimes Boris dashed over from Pogra. We used to have fires in the stove. Markovich and I would light makhorka cigarettes, put out the light, so that nothing was visible through the paper-covered windows, sit down by the stove, and give free vent to our feelings.

"As you say—Concentration Camp," Markovich began, and blew a mighty makhorka smoke cloud towards the stove. "Tell me now, what person in Moscow has a better layout than I have here? Well yes, Stalin, and perhaps a thousand others! I've got a room to myself, I get a good dinner, naturally, not without grafting a bit—but I get it. And supposing I need a new pair of trousers to-morrow, shan't I get them? I'll get them—the Soviet Press can't be allowed to run around trouserless! And further, mark my words, Comrade, I've been as smart as can be. Do you know who rules the roost here? You don't? Well, I'll tell you: The G.P.U." Markovich looked at me triumphantly.

"You'd better not laugh. If you were sitting in Moscow, confronting your Chief first, the Trade Unionists

next, the Communist Cell representatives third, the Housing Committee fourth, the Lodging Konsum fifth, and finally the G.P.U. sixth, seventh, and eighth—tell me, if you please, would you think of yourself as a living human being, or just a bit of protoplasm? And if you decide you're a living being, just how can you divide yourself into ten parts? The High Command insists on this, the Union that, the Housing Committee makes your life a burden. The G.P.U. demands nothing, says nothing, and you know nothing about it, and then, all of a sudden—Biff—and our Ivan Lukianovich is flying off to—well, you know where. Now just consider the Camp here. Ilyin is Division Head. He's my Chief, my Union, and my G.P.U., my Czar, my God. He can do with me whatever he will—well, no, naturally, he can't change me into a good-looking girl, but he can make me into a nobody at short notice. If you happened to be ordered into the Swamps for a year, I'd like to see what would be left even of a big bear like you. But one may well ask, why should Ilyin leave me to rot in a bog, or even have me shot? I know what he wants me for. He needs Enthusiasm—very well, he gets it! But wait a moment, I've something to read to you."

Markovich turns and draws out of a table behind him a bit of paper containing a printed headline.

"Now, listen to me: 'The men of the White Sea Canal Project are kindling with fiery enthusiasm at the Bolshevik Labour 'Tempo at Podporozhie'. Not bad, eh?'"

"Well put, yes," said Boris doubtfully. But 'kindling' isn't after all just the word. . . ."

"Not just the word? Will it please Ilyin? It will! Well then, the deuce with your 'not just the word'. What's a word, anyhow? Do you think I want to work myself up

for the Nobel Prize? God grant I may work myself up and out of this Camp eventually. Let me repeat: If you're in Moscow and need a pair of trousers, you have to go to your Trade Committee and beg for a requisition. But you won't get it. And even if you do get it, you won't get the trousers. And even if you're a particularly lucky devil, and do get a pair, either they're the wrong size, or else you get thick trousers in summer and thin trousers in winter. In short, it means no trousers for you—that's the disease. But here I just go to Ilyin, he gives me an order, and the upshot of it is: Markovich goes about with trousers on, and doesn't need to be ashamed of his nakedness. And what's more, I don't have to be afraid of the G.P.U. First of all, I'm in Concentration Camp already, so I've nothing further to worry about. Second—the Camp G.P.U.—that's Ilyin himself, and I know him inside out. Yes, if the G.P.U. must be, let me be at home with it. At least I'll know, in that case, all about the quarter from which danger threatens, and can give it a wide berth."

All this time Boris was experiencing considerable difficulties. While I was sickened by the stories of ruined lives told by the tattered documents in the chests and files, Boris, on the other hand, was liable to be overcome by the 'liquidation' of the creatures themselves in their actual bodily form. Nothing required for the treatment of patients ever seemed to be in stock. Moreover, it was necessary to enter daily in the Sanitary Report of the Camp a digit or series of digits—usually merely a single figure—connected with the Third Division, and signifying the total number of prisoners who had been shot that day. Why and where they were shot remained officially undisclosed. This digit had to be entered in a



separate column, not including the other deaths in Camp, and Boris was required to fill up separate cards, stating various imaginary diagnoses, and the final phrase *exitus latalis*. These were the secret executions—the most widespread method in use in the U.S.S.R.

Boris was a man who could put up with a good deal, but even to him these obligations gradually became almost impossible to carry out. He tried hard to get himself removed from the Sanitary Division, but as very few doctors were available he was unsuccessful in this. He wrote articles for *Reconstruction* on the need for sanitary regulations in Camp; as spring was on the way, and Heaven only knew what was likely to be the situation when all the frozen privies thawed simultaneously. Markovich, meanwhile, was anxious to get Boris transferred to his staff, so that he might rely on at least one cultured colleague as assistant editor. He himself did not know Russian too well, but, unfortunately, this project had little prospect of realisation. Moreover, Boris did not feel too enthusiastic about subordinating himself on a newspaper, while the nature of his contributions might have proved something of an obstacle.

“Why ever did you have to become a counter-revolutionary, Boris Lukianovich?” Markovich would say. “What would it have cost you simply to kill a man here and there? If you had done so, your position here would have been that of a patriotic Socialist, and everything would have been all right. I can arrange about your contributions, if only you can get yourself out of the Sanitary Service somehow.”

“Have you any suggestions?”

“For goodness’ sake give one of your patients strychnine instead of castor-oil. You say you have neither

strychnine nor castor-oil? Well then, something else of the same sort. After all, you're a doctor, you must know what to give. Or else amputate the sound instead of the frozen leg of one of your patients. Nobody's going to do anything about it. You will merely be removed from your position, and I will at once have you transferred to me. But, joking aside, we have got to help each other somehow. Apart from that, what in the world am I going to do with this fellow Troshin? He sticks to me like a leech."

Troshin was a poet of gigantic stature, with a powerful bass voice. He was now trying to atone for whatever sins he had committed through his poems, which were characterised by tempestuous enthusiasm. In *Reconstruction* he pilloried various loafers and offenders. He was as stupid as a mule, and often drove Markovich to the point of frenzy.

"What in the world," continued Markovich, "am I to do with the fellow? Yesterday there was a small private committee of the leaders: Yakimenko, Ilyin, and Bogoyavlenski, in other words, the 'heads'. I happened to be there, too, and what do you suppose happened? That jackass roars out his burning enthusiasm at the top of his voice—roars like a lion. I tried to stop him several times. It was a most embarrassing situation, for he is, after all, my colleague."

"Why an embarrassing situation?" asked Yura.

"Surely you know why. You can roar with enthusiasm in the newspaper or at a public meeting; but here everybody is an insider. Don't you suppose they know better?"

"Why are they supposed to know better?"

"Well, you understand, if I start roaring with enthusiasm in Yakimenko's presence, when there is nobody

else in the room, he's bound to think that I'm a jackass, or that I take him to be one. After it was all over, I asked Troshin who he thought was the bigger fool, Yakimenko or himself. And to-day Yakimenko asked me what kind of a blockhead was it that I'd got on my staff. By the way, what is a blockhead exactly?"

I explained.

"Just so, it's not enough that he's a blockhead, but he's practically digging a grave for me to lie in. Here's one of his effusions for the paper. Of course, I shan't print it. He's made the discovery that the head of the Provision Department has been stealing sugar. Fancy that! Troshin imagines himself a Christopher Columbus, as if nobody else knows that the Chief of the Provision Department has been stealing sugar and everything else he can lay his hands on. Well, deuce take this article, I'm not going to use it, and that's the end of it. But this blockhead is not content with writing the article, he must run all over the Camp shouting his loudest—"See what a smart lad I am. I've caught the head of the Provision Department at his thievish tricks." I said to him, 'Comrade Troshin, I see you're at it again'."

"At what?"

"Why, Yura, what a callow youngster you are!" replied Markovich. "When a man is head of the Provision Department, how can he help stealing?"

"Whatever do you mean by that?"

"You with your perpetual questions! It's like the question in O. Henry's story—"Papa, Why is there Nothing in an Empty Hole?" Obviously because it's an empty hole. He steals for the excellent reason that he's head of the Provision Department! Suppose the head of the Camp comes to him and says: 'Give me ten pounds of

sugar!' Do you imagine he can refuse? Or do you think the head of the Camp will restrict himself to the legal ration of sugar with his tea?"

"If he doesn't give the Chief any sugar, I suppose he will be given another job."

"Oh Lord," said Markovich, "haven't I just said what a callow lad you are?"

"Much obliged."

"Not at all, you're very welcome," went on Markovich. "If you go on working a while for the U.R.CH., you'll soon be half a yard taller, and perhaps smarter too. Do you really think the head of the Camp is as big a blockhead as Troshin? Do you really believe he would let a discharged head of the Provision Department go running around the Camp telling all and sundry that he had refused to give his Chief extra sugar, and had lost his position in consequence? Have you never seen the regulation identity cards in the U.R.CH? That poor devil's personal card would be included the very next time a batch of unfortunates was sent into the Swamps. You ought to know by now how it's done. The poor devil is woken up in the middle of the night, and somebody says, 'Pack your things'. And next morning he's on his way to meet the devil's grandmother. Do you follow me?"

"Yes."

"And if the head of the Provision Department is prepared to steal for the Chief of the Camp, why shouldn't he thief also for the head of the U.R.CH.? And if it comes to that, why shouldn't he snatch a few odds and ends for himself? You must get the hang of these things. If Troshin works himself up into a rage over some malin-gering Urk, nobody cares one way or the other. But when it

comes to the Chief of a Provision Department—why that's the kind of thing that got me my ten years' sentence."

"What were you doing exactly?"

"I was the head of a business, where I had dealings with a man in the position of our Camp Chief. How could I refuse him what he wanted? Of course, you give a little to this fellow and a little to that; but you can't give something to everybody. Well, I was still rather green, even though I had been in America, and so I got a ten years' sentence!"

"And what, as you might say, was your offence?"

"Let me tell you, Ivan Lukianovich, just to show you what a blameless person I am, but first we'll have some tea with sugar. Misha can boil some water, and then you'll see that I don't hide my sugar even from you. Why, then, should I conceal what I did to get me ten years, of which I have already served five? I brought with me from the States enough clothes for all the loafers on the Sucharevka. Now I have to manage without American clothes and without American ways. As the proverb says, 'You don't take your wife with you into a monastery'. And speaking of women, besides being ass enough to come back to the Soviet Union, I was also fool enough to bring my wife with me."

"Where is your wife now?"

Markovich glanced at the ceiling. "Don't you know, Ivan Lukianovich, that it is not good form to ask a man, who is already in his sixth year in Camp, about his wife? In five years' time I'll ask you where *your* wife is!"

### *Misha's Story*

At this point Misha brought in a tea-kettle filled with snow, and set it on the stove.

"Just ask this fellow," said Markovich to me in English, "what he thinks of our poet, Troshin."

As soon as Misha had put the tea-kettle down, he began to thrust into the stove pieces of wood that he had recently stolen from the ruins of one of the buildings.

"How do you get on with Troshin, Misha?" I asked.

Misha raised his tousled head and showed a face with all the signs of consumption. "How do I get on with him? A blockhead's a blockhead, even if he's smart enough to mix with the G.P.U."

Misha was a man of astounding poise. After what he had gone through in Camp, there were few things left in the world that could cause him any surprise.

"For instance, he came over here yesterday," he added after a short pause. "Nobody was here except myself. 'You, Misha,' he said to me, 'look what the U.S.S.R. has made out of you. You were just an ordinary criminal before, and now the Soviets have made a man of you, a compositor!'"

Misha paused and stirred up the stove.

"Well, and after that?"

"After that, he's a son of a bitch, that's what he is."

"Why a son of a bitch?"

Misha again paused for a moment. "Who made me a criminal to begin with? My father and mother perhaps? And how did I get into an advanced stage of consumption? It's supposed to be my reward to release me in six months' time, when I've only another year to live, in any case. So why make remarks like that? Does the son of a bitch think I'm a fool?"

Misha was a lad perhaps twenty years old, thin, pale, and scrubby-looking. His father, previous to the war, was a wharfinger in Nikolajev, with a little house of his own

and a garden. Came the Revolution. His mother died of grief, his father hanged himself, his sisters disappeared, no one knew where. Little Misha wandered about, and ultimately reached one of the woodcutters' Camps.

"So I was put to work on one of the regular stunts, and I noticed that the strong, healthy peasants, accustomed to this kind of work, could not keep up the pace. What would become of me? The first puff of wind was likely to blow me over. I made the attempt, but could not hold my end up, and was put in solitary confinement, with a ration of half a pound of bread a day and no more. I should never have come out of it alive but for the advice of a prisoner released from the Solovetsky Islands not to drink any water. The body begins to swell from starvation, and at the same time one suffers tortures from thirst, but the more water one drinks, the worse the swelling grows. When the swelling reaches the heart, it's the end. So I drank very little, no more than half a glass a day. Despite this, the time came when I could no longer pull my trousers over my swollen legs. After that, I remained there for a month or two and looked death in the face. Then the head of the Camp summoned me, and said: 'You're lazy. You're not willing to work, you're likely to stay lazy in solitary confinement till you die there.' "

"I answered him, 'Look, Comrade, at my hands. How can anybody with hands like these cut and saw seven and a half cubic metres of wood a day? I'm ruined in any case,' I said, 'one way or the other.' So he took pity on me and had me transferred to the Weak Strength Branch."

From the Weak Strength Branch Markovich delivered him, and taught him composing, since when they had been inseparable.

Nevertheless, Misha's lungs were almost gone. Boris had examined him, and had often brought him cod-liver oil. Misha would smile and say, "Thank you, Boris, but it would be better to give the oil to someone else. It will help me no more than an incense burner would help a corpse."

Later I chanced to witness a touching scene. Misha was sitting on the doorstep of his printing shop, in his tattered working clothes, quite green with cold. Between his knees stood a little girl from one of the nearby 'free villages', perhaps ten years old, ragged, hungry, and barefooted. Misha was carefully covering slices of bread, drop by drop, with the precious cod-liver oil, and then feeding the child.

The child swallowed the slices greedily, almost without chewing the bread, and begged him: "Little uncle, give me a little bread to take home with me."

"No, I know you'll give everything to your mother. Your mother's already old. She's in the same state that I am in—better dead. So I'll keep it all for you, so that you can grow into a big girl. Come now, eat your bread."

Boris would give Misha sound advice about deep breathing, the value of sunlight, the power of resistance in a youthful physique—a sympathetic treatment through suggestion.

Misha would smile thoughtfully, but on one occasion, when we were alone, he said, haltingly, "Your brother and Markovich are two of the best; they have hearts of gold, but it's useless for them to give themselves so much trouble about me."

"Why useless, Misha?"

"I'll be dead in a year, an old doctor here told me that. How would it be possible for me to go on living here



with these lungs of mine? What difference would it make if I were free? Perhaps I should be hungrier than I am now. I know what they call freedom. And where should I go for shelter? As for Markovich, he's the best of fellows, but he should never have taken me off the Weak Strength Branch. Had I remained there, I should have been dead long ago. As it is, I must suffer tortures for another year."

This was Misha's only grievance against Markovich. Later, in even more poignant circumstances, I was to hear a similar reproach from Professor Avdeyeff against myself. Misha died in May, so that his life had less than a year to run.

### *Alarm*

Whenever we could get an evening off we would spend it alongside Comrade Markovich's stove, discussing intellectual problems, gossiping about the affairs of the Camp, and swallowing cod-liver oil.

It was the cod-liver oil that preserved us during this period from complete collapse. As the prescribed dietary was insufficient to nourish an average man, it would have failed altogether to keep Yura alive. By legal and illegal means, largely the latter, we frequently obtained possession of cod-liver oil, and used it as follows: We would cut about half a pound of bread into cubes in a wooden bowl, and then pour cod-liver oil over the whole. That seemed to us extraordinarily appetising! Yura proposed that, after our escape, we should continue to enjoy at least one such meal daily. When we really had escaped we tried it, but soon gave it up.

For the time being our outlook seemed to be much brighter, and we used to walk up and down the banks of

the River Svir, exploring the neighbouring woods and making plans for crossing the river northwards in the direction of Lake Ladoga, which was near the route through the marshes that Boris was later obliged to take. Everything appeared to be settled.

One evening we were sitting round the stove, when Markovich was busy with his newspaper. At a late hour he returned, warmed his frozen hands at the fire, glanced through the door, and then whispered: "We're headed for the B.A.M."

Of course, we did not understand what he meant.

"The B.A.M. for the construction of the Baikal-Amur Railway, in the Far East, is a strategic undertaking; the Svir project will be abandoned. Podporozhie will go to the devil. All existing divisions will be disbanded to the last man, in favour of the B.A.M."

I felt a chill down my spine. Here was another unexpected prank of fate! Our dreams, our plans, the route through the marshes, and the almost certain flight, everything was lost in the mysterious and fearful uncertainty of this alarming B.A.M. What would happen next?

Markovich could give us no details. Everything was in confusion. The Divisional Chief had received telegraphic instructions to transport, without fail, during the next fortnight, not less than 35,000 men from the Svir undertaking to the B.A.M.—a distance of three to five thousand miles. Probably not everyone would have to go, but the result was still uncertain.

No one knew precisely what B.A.M. was, whether it meant the construction of a second track for the Amur Railway, or a new line from the northern extremity of the Sea of Baikal, over to the Sea of Japan. Either would be

almost equally bad. Worst of all would be the journey—not less than two months *en route*.

I recalled the frightful five days and nights of our journey hither from Leningrad. I multiplied these five days by twelve, and obtained a result which chilled me to the marrow. Two months—who could endure that? No news could have been worse. Like an avalanche, there descended on us the weight of sixty days amid snow-clad fields, with icy winds whistling through the holes and cracks of the freight cars, with periods of hunger, thirst, and cold. And then the B.A.M.—backwoods settlements among the horrors of Baikal-Taiga! A new undertaking built upon corpses! The same conditions that had marked the construction of the White Sea Canal, which a Camp veteran had described to me in these words: “In that place, little comrade, one drove more dead bodies into the earth than piles.”

One ray of hope remained: Yakimenko would be in supreme command of this migration. Perhaps we might succeed in making some arrangement in our favour. But such faint gleams of hope were neither clear nor persistent. The B.A.M. project stared us in the face like a grim foreboding, and overwhelmed us as suddenly as the Chekists had revealed themselves in No. 13 railway coach.

Thousands of placards plastered on the barracks and strung across the alleys, shrieked the message: “Reforging and Recasting. Up-building of Socialism and a Classless Society. World Revolution of the Toiling Masses.” Above the whole Camp, however, a blood-red cloud seemed to be hanging, on which was printed in letters of fire: “Either way leads to destruction.”

*The Cloud of Fire*

The next day the highly confidential information about the B.A.M. was known all over the Camp. The army of workers, numbering nearly 50,000 men, stood as though rooted to the ground. There was a moment of wavering, of doubt, and then, suddenly, everything was thrown into hopeless confusion. On the same day on which Markovich had surprised us with the news about the B.A.M., new divisions arrived from Leningrad, Petrosavodsk, and Medgora at the G.P.U. Headquarters in Podporozhie. The various Camps were surrounded with an impenetrable encirclement of cordons and patrols by command of the G.P.U. The watchfires of these cordons twinkled about Podporozhie like a constellation of strange stars. Communication between the separate Camps was suspended. Anyone appearing in the vicinity of the cordons and patrols was shot without warning. In this fashion, incidentally, about fifteen peasants were killed, but, of course, these casualties were a mere trifle in the universal destruction wrought by the Revolution.

Work in the Camps came to a complete standstill. Axes, saws, crowbars, shovels, and sledges were simply left lying on the ground. The number of self-inflicted injuries grew to astounding figures. Veterans of the Camps, who knew only too well what a two months' journey in freight cars signified, chopped off their hands or feet, or broke their knee-caps, in order to get into the ambulances and thus avoid the ordinary means of transportation. Utterly senseless thefts and assaults in the warehouses became common. Men tried to get into solitary confinement, or surrender to the local tribunals merely to avoid the journey in prospect. However, orders were presently issued not to admit men with self-

inflicted injuries to the ambulances, and to shoot thieves and robbers on the spot.

*Reconstruction* came out with the headline: "The Shock Troops of the Svir Project will henceforth stimulate the Bolshevik Tempo of the B.A.M. Construction!" The Camp organ also announced the signal honours that would be awarded to the future B.A.M. workers, and, most striking of all, prospects of amnesty were held out. The High Command of the G.U.L.A.G. promised the shock troops of the B.A.M. unheard-of privileges—reduction of sentences by a third or one-half, promotion to the rank of colonists, remission of impending punishments, and so forth. These prospective rewards produced an effect in the Camp something like the tolling of funeral bells over living corpses: the U.S.S.R. makes no gratuitous promises. Such pronouncements are significant. What they invariably indicate are extraordinarily onerous conditions of labour, without the slightest guarantee that these promises will be kept. When was the Government of the Soviets ever known to keep its word? Something like a state of insanity raged in all the Camps.

A detachment of carpenters attacked a Chekist cordon which was surrounding Camp No. 2, leaving eleven corpses in its trail, and then broke through the lines and disappeared into the woods, in which the snow then lay three feet deep. On the very same day snow-shoe divisions of the G.P.U. captured the missing detachment, and 'liquidated' it on the spot.

That night a dredger was thrown down an escarpment in the same Camp, with the result that its enormous weight broke through the half-yard thick ice of the river, and it was completely destroyed by the rocks beneath. In

Camp No. 3 two locomotives exploded. Three tractors raced, driverless, like iron ghosts, through Pogra—one destroying the canteen, the two others sinking into the Svir, and ending in complete destruction.

The Camp Supply Administration dispersed the contents of various warehouses in the local markets, doubtless not without assistance from the Urks and local peasants, and got drunk on vodka. On the unloading platform of a neighbouring depot, enormous stacks of wood were set on fire. Huge sheets of flame played across the wintry sky like the Northern Lights, and enabled one to read easily by firelight within a distance of at least two miles. Gunfire crackled, and shells from the plundered warehouses exploded. It seemed as though the Judgment Day of this forlorn and forgotten encampment in the forest had arrived.

### *Soviet Production*

Naturally, this orgy of flame terminated the brief span of our peaceful existence in Camp. In the presence of catastrophe, the U.R.C.H. became a madhouse. Hundreds of papers, referring to recent arrivals, were scattered on the floor in complete disorder. Evacuation rather than organisation was the order of the day. All kinds of records were heaped into a huge mountain of papers, out of which the U.R.C.H. officials had to take whatever came to hand, and endeavour, in frantic haste, to work out transport arrangements. The results were then dispatched to the Camp Chiefs, who almost invariably had never seen or heard anything of the persons specified.

The Railway Board supplied freight cars, but there was no one available to occupy them. Later, when the passengers were ready, there were no longer any trains. The

minor officials, completely bewildered in the face of conflicting orders, and influenced, like everyone else in Camp, by the fear of impending calamity, sought solace in drink, and then slept off their intoxication in all accessible holes and corners. Six complete transport trains were already assembled on the tracks. Meanwhile, Yakimenko raved and swore and deluged the Camp with gall and venom, but in vain.

The authorities marched 254 poor devils, gathered together haphazard, to the railway platform. There, however, the Transport Bureau was unwilling to accept the shipment without written instructions. A couple of miners blew up the railroad bridge connecting Pogra with the main line, by means of stolen dynamite. Meanwhile, a snowstorm was raging in the woods. Entire brigades hacked their way through the Chekist cordons with their axes, and disappeared in the woods, hoping to remain in hiding until the transportation of the Camp was completed, and then to return penitently, to receive an additional sentence of five years' imprisonment, in preference to joining the B.A.M. adventure.

When the evacuation of the Camp was nearly completed, reinforcements arrived from Medgora: fifty workers from the U.R.O.—specialists in 'Registration and Transport'—a further battalion of G.P.U. troops, and a hundred bloodhounds. Indiscriminate shooting was going on all the time in the Camps and their vicinity.

The active workers of the U.R.CH., who were almost dead from overwork, snatched whatever sleep they could on their tables and under their desks. Mysterious figures, mostly Urks and their like, frequently visited the U.R.CH. They tried to bribe the transport officials with vodka and other enticements to excuse their leaving by the early

trains. Yakimenko poked his nose into everything, pronounced appalling sentences, and then, as likely as not, immediately cancelled them. No one, with the possible exception of Starodubsev and his gang, was prepared to make the slightest search for the indispensable papers relating to transportation on either the third or the sixth, or any other train which had arrived within the preceding two months.

My own activities were dropped from the first day of the B.A.M. epoch. I became a typist, of whom there was a great shortage. There were occasions when I had to stick to the machine day and night—and good God, what a *machine* it was!

My typewriter was a typical Soviet product, from a Soviet factory in Kazan, so Yura nicknamed it 'the orphan of Kazan'. Every part of it rattled and vibrated. I would be sitting in front of this orphan of mine, nearly dead with fatigue, and Yakimenko would be standing near me watching my fingers. The carriage would suddenly be released and swing to the left. Twelve copies of documents in the machine at once would be spoilt. Yakimenko would repress a curse, while the innumerable clerks sitting around waiting for forms to be handed to them, would draw a deep breath of relief, since this mishap would give them a chance for a nap, while I would have to toil through the entire night and reproduce the spoilt forms as best I could, expecting every minute that the typewriter would break down again.

Numerous books describing the difficulties of Soviet production have already appeared, and I can only add my testimony to what has already been stated. I was struggling with difficulties for hours on end in a pitiful attempt to achieve the impossible.



Tens of thousands of freight cars left the rails and tumbled over embankments (according to the records of Lazar Kaganovitch, People's Commissar for Transport, there were 62,000 accidents to rolling stock in 1935). Such was the outcome of the once famous manufactures of Sormovo and Kolomna. Hundreds of thousands of tractors rusted in their iron sepulchres. Millions of men worked themselves to death on stupidly arranged jobs, quite beyond their capacity, in various Soviet institutions; on construction works, in sovkhoses, in Camps, and on canal undertakings, and the whole gigantic effort was finally extinguished in the vast swamp of Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism.

All this really is bound up with the problem of workmanship—unfortunately, under the Soviets, quality is inseparable from politics, from leadership, from financial control.

On the surface of this Communist morass, there glimmer such faded and ghostly ruins as the abandoned and almost forgotten Turksib Railway project, the futile Dnieprostroi, the utterly useless White Sea-Baltic Canal. Titanic undertakings. Mere pretexts for the burial places of men and machines! Meanwhile, numberless colleagues of Yakimenko are sauntering about in elegant cavalry cloaks, purveyors to the cemeteries of men. Meanwhile, catastrophe impended.

### *‘Promfinplan’*

We were now launched upon as appalling and futile an undertaking as the earlier White Sea Canal. We workers in the transshipment office bent over our tasks with the sound of musketry fire in the Camp always in our ears, attempting to achieve the impossible in frantic

haste and with shattered nerves. Naturally, what obsessed us most was the fate that was in store for each of us individually.

Orders read: 35,000 inmates of the Podporozhie Division are to be assigned to the B.A.M. Project within two weeks. Exemptions were granted to all former soldiers and officers, all natives of the Far East, all those whose sentences expired before June 1, 1934, all counter-revolutionaries, all sick according to a designated list.

These orders naturally provoked a whole series of questions. Was it impossible to find 35,000 workers somewhere nearer the Far East, instead of carrying them across half a continent? Would it not have been better to await the advent of warmer weather, instead of entraining the 35,000 workers under almost impossible conditions? Had it never occurred to the G.P.U. that it was impracticable to convey so many men, in so short a time, at such brief notice? In fine, couldn't the G.P.U. understand how utterly absurd it was to select from the 45,000 inmates of the Podporozhie Division so great a number of men who were fit for the undertaking?

No doubt, Yakimenko could be depended on to carry out his 'Promfinplan' without compassion. No one with any shred of humanity could have risen to such a position as his. Any other would have been crushed on the way. Yakimenko could be relied on to herd the necessary number of poor devils into his draughty freight cars. Well or ill, he would pack the necessary number. The sick ones would, of course, die on the way, but what of that? The U.S.S.R. has never let the comfort of the workers impede the execution of any great undertaking.

*Curve of Transport*

During all these weeks our chief anxiety was lest Yura should be sent away to the B.A.M. undertaking. It presently appeared that neither Boris nor I was destined for the journey. Paragraph 58-6 (Espionage) governed our case, and consequently Yakimenko was debarred from sending us away, even if he wished to do so. The same paragraph did not apply to Yura's case, so that Boris and I would remain, while Yura was likely to be sent away alone, despite the state of his health, the operation he had undergone during the summer, his under-nourishment in prison and in Camp, and his labours in the makhorka-laden air of the U.R.CH. for sixteen to twenty hours daily. At the very beginning I had begged Yakimenko to allow Yura to remain behind. His reply was curt and ambiguous. Yura was likely to be left if the normal quota of men to be transported could be maintained, but, on the other hand, it daily became more evident that this quota could not be reached.

After Yakimenko no longer needed to avail himself of my special talents, he ignored me. I became a person to whom no further consideration need be extended, and with whom no further conversation need be held. Yakimenko himself was as overworked as anyone, as he was in charge of the whole Camp, including the U.R.CH. It was not an easy matter to send Yura's colleagues with the departing trainloads and leave him behind. Any hopes we had placed in Yakimenko waned with each day. Once his powerful support was withdrawn, the Activists of the U.R.CH. reopened hostilities, and under the changed conditions were able to harass us in all kinds of ways.

Yura and I had now completed the lists for the third transport train. It remained for me to deliver them to

Yakimenko at Pogra. The time was near three o'clock in the morning. The pass which I required for this purpose was not yet ready. In the circumstances, it was difficult for me to stay and dangerous to leave. I decided to leave, and arrived quite safely. When I handed over my papers to Yakimenko, it was discovered that four whole pages had been stolen from each copy. This would prevent the departure of the division. The Activists in Pogra informed Yakimenko that I must have lost the missing pages. I intimated that it was next door to impossible to lose exactly four pages from each file, while it was against my interests to remove these pages deliberately, as I should only have the task of copying them all over again. All this was reasonable enough, but the conversation I had with Yakimenko, whose plans had been completely upset by the theft, was extremely unpleasant, especially with reference to Yura's prospects of being allowed to remain behind. The fact that such incidents were of daily occurrence did not avail to reassure me.

Meanwhile, train after train was leaving. Through Boris, who was in contact with the passengers, tidings of their hard fate reached us from time to time. Even on the loading platform they were dispatched with inadequate supplies of bread and firewood—sometimes with none at all. The assumption was that the G.P.U. depots along the railway would supply the various trains with everything required. But no one undertook any such responsibility. The earlier trains managed to pick up a little *en route*, the rest got along, God knows how. Railwaymen told stories of the stopping of trains at small God-forsaken stations, where hundreds of frozen corpses were carried out of the trains, and piled in heaps at one side of the line. Further reports arrived of railway accidents, in which the crazed

passengers howled and shrieked in the overturned wrecks of the freight cars, which, while unable to withstand a collision, were strong enough to baffle the efforts of the unfortunate passengers to release themselves.

I could not drive out of my mind the awful idea of Yura's frozen corpse being removed at some deserted station behind the barrier of the Urals, and thrown over some hillside, to rest among a disgusting mass of intermingled corpses.

### *Counsels of Despair*

None of us was willing to admit for a moment that Yura would be ordered to the B.A.M. Project. Our previous journey had been made in car No. 13 when we were drugged by doctored tea and were then taken while asleep. That could never happen a second time. We were determined that Yura must escape the B.A.M., or the three of us would plan some desperate adventures, in which we might all perish. Yura alone declared that it was quite unnecessary for the three of us to die. If, despite all our efforts, he must make the journey, he would try to escape on the way. This was absurd, as it was almost impossible to effect an escape in such fashion.

Boris came over from Pogra in a very despondent state of mind. His manual labour was considerably less than ours. He passed whole days between Camps, hospitals, and ambulance stations, and, consequently, spent a good deal of time in the open air. He supervised the kitchens of the Sanitary Control, and, therefore, lived on the fat of the land; his regular daily ration—a piece of bread and two wedges of frozen porridge—he always brought over for our consumption. On the other hand, his duties as a

doctor, in the thick of cases of self-mutilation, shootings, and trainloads of sick persons, were enough to drive any man crazy. Boris was convinced that Yakimenko would never keep his half-promise regarding Yura, and that we must make up our minds to escape before our strength was impaired.

Our plan of escape was connected to some extent with the following circumstances. On the way from Podporozhie to Pogra was a Chekist post of three men. With these men Boris and I were well acquainted. Boris, in fact, often passed that post two or three times a day. Our idea was for the three of us to leave Podporozhie late in the evening with our belongings. Boris and I would pause at the camp-fire of the Chekist post and chat with its members. When they were off their guard, Boris was to knock down the nearest Chekist with his fist, and then attack a second. At the same time I was to attempt to deal with the third Chekist, and put him out of action, if I could.

There would be no chance to use a knife or an axe; the plan depended on a lightning stroke and complete surprise for its success. The Chekist custom of wearing long sheepskin coats was unfavourable to our enterprise, as it protected the guards from assault in vulnerable places. My own capacity to deal a formidable blow was doubtful, and the Chekist whom I selected for attack might prove stronger than I. The plan was risky, but nevertheless possible.

The 'liquidation' of the Chekist post would give us three guns, perhaps 150 cartridges, and some provisions to sustain us on our northward march from Podporozhie and across the Svir. The difficulty was what to do next.

The woods were deep with snow. Snow-shoes might

be obtained, but of a kind hardly suitable for our purpose, considering the uneven terrain, full of roots and holes. The Chekists we were to overpower were bound to be discovered the same night or early the following morning. A squad of pursuers would immediately take up the chase, accompanied by better bloodhounds than the Wild West had ever dreamed of. Telephone warnings would go out, and undoubtedly other squads would try to cut us off.

We would, it is true, have guns. Boris is a first-class shot, but he is also extremely short-sighted, in consequence of his imprisonment in the Solovetsky Islands. Neither Yura nor I are more than average marksmen. With scanty provisions, no maps or compasses, what were our chances of success?

In the short hours during which I tossed, sleepless, on the bare boards of my bunk, I felt that the chances were poor indeed. We might, however, be faced with no alternative but to put this plan into effect.

### *Markovich is Reconstructed*

We thought Markovich might be able to help us, but his suggestions were impracticable in the extreme. Unfortunately, he could not give his undivided attention to the matter, as he was obsessed with his own immediate departure for the B.A.M. front, to avert which he summoned all his energies and exerted all his influence, but without avail. Misha was to remain, as he was considered a permanent member of the staff of the Medgora printing office. Troshin continued to hang round the Camp, spraying enthusiasm on all sides like a hose.

One day all six of us, including Markovich, Misha, and Troshin, were sitting in the little editorial office together. Most of us were at breaking point, although Troshin

continued his senseless chatter about the alleged advantages of the B.A.M. Project, which was indescribably nauseating to us. At length I interrupted his tirade, told him to shut up and go to the devil, whereupon he began to argue with me anew.

Misha was busy setting up an article on the subject of enthusiasm. Suddenly he stepped aside, as though accidentally, and struck Troshin on the head, with what little strength he had, with his composing-stick. Troshin, astonished, sank to his knees, but jumped up again almost immediately, threw Misha to the ground, and clutched him by the throat. Boris quietly gripped Troshin and flung him into a corner of the room.

Misha stood trembling with rage. "I'll cut your throat, you Bolshevik whore, you Chekist lickspittle, till your guts fall out. I have nothing to lose, I already have one foot in the grave."

Despite the fury in his voice, Misha's tone indicated a grim determination. Troshin rose shakily to his feet, a thin trickle of blood running down one of his temples.

"I've always told you what an idiot you are, Troshin," observed Markovich. "Now we shall see how much enthusiasm you will show on the transport train."

Troshin gave us a momentary glimpse of the real basis of his persistent enthusiasm. "We're leaving in a passenger train," he blurted out.

"Ha, in a passenger train; perhaps you would like to make the trip in a parlour car, Comrade Troshin? With good bedding and a dining-car. You had better pray to God that we at least get an airtight freight car and a stove. Yesterday I saw a train leave with stoves enough, but no stove pipes. Passenger train, indeed, Troshin. You ought to see a doctor."



Troshin stared blankly at Misha's pale face for a while, looked at Boris, then gathered up his possessions, and disappeared. I never saw him or Markovich again. They were deported the next day. Boris was there. They were in a freight car full of holes, and without any stove pipe.

When he bade me farewell Markovich observed: "Do you know that I arrived in the Soviet Union in a first-class coach? When a man enters paradise, he ought to arrive in a first-class coach, at least. And now I'm setting out for paradise again, but not in a first-class carriage, nor is it the Socialist Paradise that I'm going to. It would be interesting to know if there really is any paradise. I shall find out soon enough. If you would too, Ivan Lukianovich, you can correspond with one who has entered paradise. What, you think I shall get there safely? In my state of health? I know well enough what's going to happen on this trip, and you know it too. Perhaps a tough peasant who has been used to this sort of thing all his life might be able to stand it, but, after all, I'm a white-collar worker. No, no, there's no chance for me. If you should happen to run across my wife, Ivan Lukianovich (everything is possible in this world), tell her that nobody should ever marry a trusting individual. Socialist Paradise forsooth! Both of us received an equal share of the Socialist Paradise."

### *Slippery Ways*

Comrade Yakimenko's 'Promfinplan' broke down in all directions. There was no further talk of two weeks or of 35,000 men. The railway either delivered no trains at all or delivered trains which even the Receiving Commission of the B.A.M. Project refused to consider, containing cars with holes big enough not only for a man, but for a

horse to get through. The medical examination of the Camp inmates gave appalling results. Not more than 8,000 men could be certified as fit for transportation, and even these within certain limits.

Meanwhile, the W.B.C. Administration, seizing the pretext that very little work was now being done, and doubting whether it ought to continue feeding workers who were going elsewhere, cut down rations almost to vanishing point. Men began to die from starvation by hundreds and even thousands. Medical commissions were set up again, with one of which I became associated. A little old doctor, with mournful resignation, would receive a tattered individual who held out his dropsical and swollen leg for inspection, and then put him through the usual examination. Seated at the table next to him was the official of the Third Division, who constituted the so-called commission.

"Well?" the official would ask.

"Dropsy, as you see, tuberculosis in its secondary stage, heart trouble."

Whereupon the official would promptly write in his book—"Fit for service." Later, affairs were managed even more simply. Half a dozen Urks were armed with erasers. They erased all entries on the backs of cards relating to medical inspection, and, instead, wrote right across the card—"First Category," in other words, completely fit for work.

These men had no chance whatever of reaching the scene of the B.A.M. Project alive. We knew it, they knew, and, of course, Yakimenko knew it perfectly well. But he had his own career to consider, and he must insist on carrying out his 'Promfinplan', no matter how many thousands of lives it might cost. All these men, miracu-

lously restored to health by an eraser, were consigned to certain death, as surely as if they had simply been pushed through holes in the ice of the Svir River.

Meanwhile, Yura and I continued to write out our useless formulae. Towards night time the room would gradually empty itself, and we would remain in solitude in front of our machines. The entire card collection of the U.R.C.H. was thus left in our charge. Out of every dozen documents submitted to him, Yakimenko would, as a rule, sign three only, and fully approve but one. Those men whose cards he signed were posted: one to the W.B.C. Combine, one to the B.A.M., and the third to the G.U.L.A.G. in Moscow. The remaining cards represented men employed in the Transport Division, Hospital Division, etc.

This gave us an idea. In the first three signed cards we proposed to leave everything unaltered. In the remaining nine we proposed to insert the names of obviously sick men, as indicated by their card records, or else mix everything up to such an extent that no one could make head or tail of it. In the confusion now prevailing it would probably never be discovered whether the cards had been mixed up accidentally or purposely. Certainly, at the moment no one was likely to unravel the tangle.

In case this plan miscarried, I had other cards up my sleeve. To risk my own life was serious enough, but I had no right to endanger the life of my youthful son. Apart from this, I had on my conscience the blunders committed in connection with Madame E. and Babenko, in so far as they had contributed to the subsequent fate of both Yura and Boris. Moreover, I was tired to death and oppressed by a consciousness of the utter futility of

existence. What good would it do, after all, to save a few dozen lives, which was all we could hope for, out of many thousands? Especially when, at best, instead of perishing after a month in the transport train, they were certain to die, in any case, after a few months of their normal W.B.C. existence. Was the game really worth the candle?

Early one morning, we retired from the U.R.CH. to our tent. The air was frosty and still, the empty streets of Podporozhie were hidden under a heavy fall of snow.

"Dad," said Yura, "I can't help feeling we've got to keep on with it. There's no other way."

"On the other hand, Yurchik," I answered, "we are likely, as a result, to figure in the column marked 'Persons who died outside the Camp'."

"Well, then, let the grass grow over our heads."

"Do you think we have any real chance of getting out of here alive?"

"Yes, I think so."

"And I think the reverse. Another month and we shall be as thin as rakes. It all comes to the same thing."

"What?"

"After all, it's a question of humanity. We can save some of these people. We can! I say, let's be shot for it afterwards. The devil take the hindmost. There is no reason why we should linger in this paradise."

Before we were ever in Camp, Yura had often said he would have shot himself, if he had ever thought we should never escape from the Soviet Union. If life were never to be any different from this, what was the good of living? But, then, what does an eighteen-year-old boy know about life and its purposes?

Yura paused, and then sat down in the snow. "Let us



THE AUTHOR'S SON, YURA

sit down for a minute, and at least clear our lungs of the U.R.C.H. makhorka smoke."

I sat down beside him.

"I know, Dad, you're terribly worried over me, but you've really no cause for worry. If it comes to the point—and it will come to it when we have got to face the Bolsheviks with guns in our hands—will you still have no alternative to recommend, in view of the risk involved?"

"If it comes to that point," and I shrugged my shoulders.

"Let's hope it does come to that point. Assuming, of course, we attempt to escape."

"We'll escape surely enough," I replied.

"If we were only free," sighed Yura, "and had money and weapons, how easily we could escape. But as it is?"

We were both silent for a space. We had discussed this idea so frequently.

"Look, Dad," Yura went on, "if we don't do what we have decided to do with these lists, we shall always regret it. We could have done it already, but our courage failed us."

We were silent once more. Finally Yura got up from his soft seat and stretched himself.

"Then, for God's sake, let's do it, Dad. What do you say?"

"Very well," I answered.

We shook hands on it firmly, not without a certain paternal pride on my part.

We did nothing immediately, for the good and sufficient reason that we needed sleep. The only time at our disposal for manipulating the cards amounted to four or five hours daily, when we were supposed to be sleeping. If

we had each of us been working singly, one would no doubt have postponed the matter after the first sleepless nights; since, however, we were acting jointly, neither of us wanted to be the first to beat a retreat. We managed at each delivery of cards to rescue some fifteen or twenty men, which was a fairly high proportion compared with an average total of five hundred names, and rumours about the U.R.C.H. management soon began to be rife in Pogra.

Our relations with Yakimenko took a turn for the worse. Yura and I could scarcely stand on our legs through fatigue and sleeplessness. Without intending it, we did our work in such a way as to create disorder on the departure platforms.

Between Yakimenko and Boris there was constant friction, which did not bode well for the future, and Boris was not backward in asserting himself. The chief doctor of the division fell ill, and Boris was promoted to his place, one of his duties being to sign all the cards which had been erased in the space devoted to medical reports, and thus certify the persons concerned as fit for work.

One morning Boris reached the U.R.C.H., unwashed and unshaven, in a state of mingled irritation and confusion, like the rest of us. He handed me his daily gift—a lump of frozen porridge. There was something unusual in his manner and a glint in his eyes. I guessed he had reached a final decision and felt uneasy in consequence. I wanted to ask him what the trouble was, but Yakimenko had already entered the room, holding in his hand a paper for us to sign. He seemed angry and bewildered; he was working as hard as the rest of us, and yet his ‘Promfinplan’ was every day showing poorer results.

When Yakimenko noticed Boris, he turned to him and said:

"I have a complaint against you, Dr. Solonevich, from the Enrolment Commission of the Third Division, which says you are always showing hostility. What's the meaning of this? I must warn you that nobody is going to tolerate such conduct."

"I have a complaint to make myself, Comrade Chief," returned Boris, "against these same individuals."

Yakimenko's cold and usually impassive countenance betrayed resentment.

"To hell with your complaint," he said. "This is a Concentration Camp, not a university clinic. You are expected to carry out my orders for the Third Division without question."

"The Third Division has the right," said Boris, "to give me orders as a prisoner, but it has no right to control my actions as a doctor. The Third Division can pay attention to my diagnoses or not, as it chooses. I will not, however, endorse their diagnoses."

The law in this matter was on the side of Boris. I perceived that here was a critical encounter between two determined adversaries with, of course, all the odds in favour of Yakimenko. The veins on his forehead began to swell.

Boris went on, "If you will allow me, Comrade Chief, I should like to make it clear that I must absolutely refuse hereafter to sign the decisions of the Enrolment Commission under existing circumstances."

Yakimenko glared at Boris, and thrust his hand into his pocket. I thought, in my excited state, that Yakimenko was reaching for his revolver, and felt that if Yakimenko tried to use his revolver, or continued with



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his accusations, Boris would certainly attack him, and that would be the end of the 'Promfinplan' in the Camp, as well as of Yakimenko's life. Meanwhile, Boris transferred the written complaint, which Yakimenko had refused to accept, from his right to his left hand, leaving his right arm hanging apparently loose at his side. I remembered this posture from his boxing days. My mind was in a turmoil, Boris was about to strike, Activists and Chekists would rush at us with the violence of a mob. Yura and I would strike out with our fists on all sides, and within fifteen seconds all our problems would be finally solved.

An awkward silence ensued. Suddenly from the bench next to the stove, on which Yakimenko's deputy, Khorunzhik, was reposing, a volley of curses rang out. Curses, as a matter of course, constituted Khorunzhik's exclusive vocabulary. Even when he had to compile reports to Headquarters, he made use of such outrageous language that I had to strike out everything but the prepositions and conjunctions. In this instance his abuse was directed at no one in particular. He was simply in a state of chronic irritability, even in his sleep, because of all these confounded Commissions. Presently he turned over on his other side, and pulled his cloak over his head.

Yakimenko pulled some cigarettes out of his pocket and offered them to Boris. I could scarcely trust my eyes.

"Thanks, Comrade Chief, I don't smoke."

The cigarettes were then offered to me.

"Tell me, Dr. Solonevich," inquired Yakimenko curtly, "why the devil did you accept this post on the Commission anyhow? This is really not your job. You are an expert in sanitation. No wonder the Third Division

has no confidence in your diagnoses. It leads to no end of trouble when people tackle jobs that are strange to them."

The speech was in an ironical vein. Yakimenko was obviously trying to withdraw from his position, and it was policy to make his retreat as smooth as possible.

"I have often told him that, Comrade Yakimenko," I broke in. "Dr. Schuwetz is really responsible for the whole of this muddle."

"Yes, that's it. It's that sleepy old Dr. Schuwetz."

Yakimenko promptly seized the opportunity to save his face.

"Well, I'll give orders to-day to release you from further activity in connection with this Commission. Look after the sanitation of the transport trains. And remember you will be responsible to me for the smallest details. No more excuses. I intend to have the transport trains dispatched in first-class condition!"

It was, of course, impossible to dispatch the transport trains in any kind of decent condition, much less in first-class order, for the simple reason that no adequate equipment was available.

Nevertheless, Boris replied, "Depend on it, Comrade Chief."

In the corner I noticed the baffled face of Starodubtsev, which said plainly enough—"The devil alone knows what all this means." In fact, I did not understand the position any better myself.

When we met for a meal in the evening, Boris said, "Whatever may be the explanation, it's always a satisfaction to have dealings with a man of intellect, even if he's only a clever scoundrel."

I had already guessed the reason for Yakimenko's

retreat. While we were standing in line, waiting for our food, I suggested a guessing contest, in which each of us should state the reason for Yakimenko's retreat, after which the answers could be compared.

Yura interrupted Boris, who was about to announce his solution.

"Stop a minute, and let me think. Then tell me whether I have the right answer or not."

After we had eaten, Yura began, in the manner of Sherlock Holmes addressing Dr. Watson, "What would have happened if Yakimenko had ordered Boris to be arrested? First, you can never get any agreement among doctors. Secondly, what would Dad have done? He could only have done one thing—appear before the Receiving Commission of the B.A.M. Project, and explain to them that Yakimenko had been lying to them all along about sending trainloads of alleged workers, who were certain to die on the way. Then some member of the B.A.M. Commission would be sent to Headquarters in Medgora and the fat would be in the fire. Am I right?"

"You are almost entirely right," said Boris, "with the single exception that the B.A.M. Commission would have applied not to Medgora, but to the G.U.L.A.G. The G.U.L.A.G. would have held Yakimenko responsible for the expenses incurred in consignments of corpses, and the U.R.C.H. would have convicted him of gross incompetence. Apart from that, you and Dad would have been put out of the way, and then Yakimenko could have swallowed me whole, without even taking the trouble to bite."

My own explanation was identical, although it still seems to me that it was not quite so simple a matter for

Yakimenko to reach a decision. That same evening I heard his voice again from the next room.

"Solonevich, Yura, come in here!"

Yura rose from his machine, while we exchanged troubled glances.

"Were you the one who wrote this document?"

"Yes, Comrade Chief."

I began to feel very uncomfortable, for this was one of our falsified documents.

"Allow me to ask you where you got this name from. Let me see, Abburrachmanov? I cannot find this name in the card index."

At this point my heart seemed to sink into my boots.

"I don't know, Comrade Chief, there must be a mix-up somewhere."

"Mix-up? In your own head."

"Quite likely," Yura answered readily, "it was in my own head."

There was a tense silence, and then Yakimenko growled:

"Mix-up, indeed! I'll put you in solitary confinement for a week."

"Then I shall be able to get a little sleep at least, Comrade Yakimenko."

"Make out all these documents again. Starodubtsev must now check all documents. Every document must henceforth bear the checker's signature. Is that understood?"

Yura returned from Yakimenko's office as pale as a ghost. His trembling fingers could hardly pick out the keys of the machine. My own hands trembled equally. But it seemed as though we had escaped once more. Would our luck hold out?

Our manipulations of the cards were almost bound to come to light, without any intervention on Yakimenko's part, as no one could go without sleep indefinitely. But the question was, how much did Yakimenko know or guess?

### *The Test of Endurance*

I delivered in Pogra papers connected with the next trainload of men, and then wandered about the Camp for a while. It was a frosty day, but after the close atmosphere of the U.R.Ch., it was a treat to breathe in the clear air. The Camp had altered out of all recognition. For some time past no parties of prisoners had been sent into the woods, for fear some of them should attempt to escape, although it was not clear where they could escape to, and consequently the firewood had all been used up. And so this was the end of all that had been achieved with such terrific exertions and sacrifices during the preceding months—all consumed in the stoves and gone up in smoke. Barracks, warehouses, and communal kitchens were being destroyed for firewood. A large Diesel engine, which had been used in the construction of a dam and wrecked by some persons unknown, lay on a snowy scrap-heap. All kinds of other imported articles lay about, broken and in disorder. Some four hundred men were standing about in a crowd in front of the bath-house. About them was a chain of G.P.U. sharp-shooters. They stood at a slight distance, holding their guns in the hollow of their arms, according to G.P.U. regulations. In addition, the crowd was covered with two light machine-guns. In the foreground stood a table, at which sat the ruling powers. Someone called out:

"Ivanov." Silence.

"Petrov." Again silence.

These proceedings are known as the test of endurance. The inhabitants of the Camp have either lost or destroyed their working cards, which are the only evidence of personal identification, and now when any man is called to join a party for the next train to the B.A.M. Project, he prefers not to answer to his name. Thereupon, the whole crowd of them is driven out of its barracks into the freezing air, kept in order by the encircling cordon of sharp-shooters, and the roll-call begins anew. Again there is no response. The men at the table vanish, the guards are changed, but the crowd remains standing in the freezing air. And after a lapse of hours, one after another of the silent men begin to answer to their names. First the workmen and the Intelligentsia, then the peasants, and finally the Urks. Frequently the Urks hold out to the very last: one of them, in a state of collapse, will fall down in the snow, half frozen, and will be dragged to the ambulance—or to the grave, already prepared for mass burial. Silence is, on the whole, a completely ineffective form of resistance. In this crowd a number of prisoners have already fallen to the ground. They are not picked up at once, so as to counteract any attempt at cheating. The story is current that a group of workers had established a record: they had withstood the test of endurance for two days and nights, and barely half of them altogether responded to their names. Of the remaining half, very few were left alive.

### *Reunion*

A half-ready transport train was standing on the line. The approaches were encircled with barbed wire and

guarded by patrols. I happen to be in possession of a pass, and am allowed access to the cars. Some are already occupied. From the others the prospective passengers are removing snow, dirt, and slag, and closing up the holes. In short, the Soviet project is in action. Suddenly a resounding voice rings out behind me.

"Hallo! Ivan Lukianovich. Hallo, Comrade Solonevich."

I turn round as a figure leaps with astounding agility from one of the carriages. He wears a not too tattered coat and displays a heavy growth of whiskers and beard. Still crying out and waving his cap, he runs towards me, while I await his coming. He grips my hand enthusiastically with iron fingers.

"Good day to you, Ivan Lukianovich. I'm delighted to see you. I know it's somewhat indecent to display so much pleasure at meeting an old friend in such a place. But man is a feeble creature, and why should I disrupt the harmony of universal equality by trying to be a superman?"

I gaze at him steadily, but still fail to recognise him. 'Bearded like the pard,' with merry roguish eyes, he presents the appearance of a man difficult to discourage.

"Look here," a voice exclaims indignantly through a forest of whiskers, "don't you really recognise me? Have you actually ascended to such administrative heights that you can no longer welcome a simple Camp comrade?"

As if someone had suddenly passed a cleansing sponge across the face of the red-headed athlete, had removed his whiskers, and taken away his *bushlat*, there suddenly appeared the countenance of Zenovy Hendelmann, just as I had known him in Moscow days, and still with the



same combination of good humour and roguishness. It is an equal impropriety for me to express much pleasure at meeting him under present circumstances. So we remain standing there, shaking hands.

"Well, here you are at last," Hendelmann begins merrily. "I always predicted it, nor have I forgotten that you prophesied the same for me. What intelligent fellows we are, after all. Only how does it happen that this same intelligence wasn't astute enough to keep us out of such entanglements? Astonishing, isn't it? However, we must keep up our courage and ignore these little mishaps. When our leaders, the salt of the earth, the iron guards of Leninism, the white hope of future humanity, when these people settle in the G.P.U. encampments like flies on honey, then what is there to say? Well? One must say heartily: Welcome, Comrade."

"Stop," I interrupted him, "don't forget we are not alone."

"Oh! Never mind. Brave fellows! Our crowd consists of peasants from the Urals, fellows of the good old stamp. First-rate chaps. Well, then, on account of what paragraphs in the existent or non-existent laws were you sent hither?"

I told him my story. The roguish gleam in Hendelmann's eyes is quenched.

"Yes, that's bad. That's certainly hard luck."

Hendelmann looks around and observes in German:

"You're trying to escape?"

"Up to now, we've taken that for granted. But now comes the problem of my son's possible transportation. Rack your brains, Hendelmann, and find me an answer to that riddle."

Hendelmann tugs at his whiskers, and lets his glance rove over the length of the train, the barbed wire, the woods, and the snow, as though he were seeking there for the answer to my question.

"Have you already tried all possible approaches to the B.A.M. Commission?"

"I've thought of that too, but it seems hopeless."

"Perhaps it's not altogether hopeless. The head of that Commission is a fellow by the name of Chekalin, whom I knew at the Camp in Wishera. First of all, he has been a Communist since the early days of the Revolution; secondly, he's in no sense a fool. When a Communist who is no fool, and who has been a party member as long as that, has not reached a commanding position yet—and his position is certainly nothing remarkable—that can only mean that he's an essentially decent fellow, and is likely to remain so. Naturally, he's quite conscious of that himself. In any case, the situation has tangible psychological possibilities."

"A new idea; but what kind of psychological possibilities can be expected in this madhouse? Chekalin is a nervous, irritable, hasty, overworked individual, half insane from his continual warfare with Yakimenko."

"Or else, why don't you try and come along with us? Our train will probably leave to-morrow morning; or if the worse comes to the worst, why don't you send your son along with us? He'll never die in this crowd. I've been receiving packages from outside regularly, and am pretty well taken care of for the journey. What do you say? Think over it."

I pressed Hendelmann's hand gratefully, but did not adopt his suggestion.

"And now tell me your story," said I.

By birth a Jew, by training an engineer, Hendelmann was by profession an athletic instructor. This change of profession is a fairly common happening in the Soviet Union. While an engineer derives a better income, he has, on the other hand, an enormous responsibility, particularly towards the G.P.U., with respect to accidents, non-fulfilment of plans and projects and various other liabilities, in consequence of which quite naturally his life is scarcely worth living. An athletic instructor sometimes receives less, occasionally more money; but he is not likely to encounter the G.P.U. and may have the possibility of living some kind of life worth having. In addition to this, it is sometimes possible, secretly, to earn a little extra money in one's own proper profession. Hendelmann was a first-rate athlete and an excellent organiser. But even the immunity of sport from interference by the G.P.U. is problematic and relative. In connection with the contemplated political utilisation of the field of sport which I have previously described, some five hundred athletic instructors were arrested, and subsequently transported to all kinds of none too pleasant little places. Hendelmann was one of these.

"Really, I haven't any story to tell. I was seized and dragged before the G.P.U. in Lubianka Street, and then confined in prison. Three months later I was brought up for a hearing. Naturally the G.P.U. already knew everything there was to know. That I was a former member of the Sokal (Pan-Slavic Sport Organisation); that I had entertained many fellow members in my district; that I was in correspondence with the Sokal centre; that I had even sent a telegram of good wishes to one of their meetings."

"I sat there and listened to all they said, and then remarked: 'Very well, comrades, you know everything?'"

"Naturally, we know everything."

"Even the rules of Sokal?"

"Even these."

"Then if you will allow me to ask, how is it that you don't know that as a Jew I am not eligible to join this organisation? What do you think the investigating judge said to that?"

"Does it make any difference to you, Comrade Hendelmann, why you are present here, whether on account of the Sokal or of something else?"

"Wasn't that an instance of a genial insight into the depths of men's hearts? Just imagine it! It was assumed to be a matter of total indifference to me on what charge I was being examined by the G.P.U."

"You wonder why I have been working as a wood-cutter? Why shouldn't I? First of all, in so doing, my hands become real workers' proletarian hands. In the second place, I keep my health. I'm allowed to receive food packages from outside, and it's certainly better for me to fell trees than to contract haemorrhoids in the white-collar division of some Camp. In the third place, I have the pleasure of associating, not with Activists, but with those very decent fellows the peasants. At first, I was afraid of anti-Semitism, but I can assure you they have no more of that than you have of Communist idealism. They are honest fellows and good companions, and no Soviet Svoboda in the group. I have already worked through three years, and there are only two left. What? Apply for a commutation of sentence?"

Here Hendelmann's voice grew harsh and stern.

"Ivan Lukianovich, I shouldn't have expected that kind of advice from you. Those bandits threw me in prison for no offence whatsoever. Separated me from wife and child—and the child was only two weeks old—and then you expect me to lower myself to ask them a favour?"

Hendelmann's usually merry eyes flashed an angry light.

"No, Ivan Lukianovich, not that. I'll serve my time, and await my release, if God wills, and after that, we'll see. God grant that you and I may see each other again. Meanwhile, have a look at these peasants of mine. Splendid chaps, aren't they?"

Dusk was falling. The patrols were marching alongside the train, and driving the passengers back into the carriages. I shall have to bid Hendelmann good-bye.

"Give Boris and your son, whom I am sorry not to have been able to see, my best greetings, if that doesn't sound too much like irony. For the rest, keep up your spirits, and as far as Chekalin is concerned, think over the matter carefully."

### *Misfortune*

I would have tried the next day to get over to Pogra again to cheer myself with another chat with Hendelmann, but matters in Camp had taken an ominous turn. Yura told me in the evening that Yakimenko had left that morning to spend two or three days in Medgora, and that immediately after his departure the R.B.U. Activists had entered his name for the next transport train; that a confirmation by Ilyinitch, the Division Leader, had already been signed, and that a guard was coming that very evening to take him in charge—a

method not previously employed. All this he had discovered from a Chekist acquaintance in the Third Division whom Yura had previously obliged by transcribing, in verse, certain love-letters; even Chekists are sometimes prone to poetic moods.

My pass for Pogra was good until midnight. I handed it over to Yura, and he at once disappeared in the direction of Pogra, with instructions to do his best to keep out of harm's way, but, in case of failure, to hide and as a last resort to take refuge in Hendelmann's train.

As it happened, however, Hendelmann's train had already left. Boris hid Yura in the hospital morgue, where he remained two days and nights, while the Activists made a frantic but vain search throughout the Camp. To describe in detail the anxieties of these two days is, naturally, for me an impossibility.

Two days later Yakimenko returned. I told him that Starodubtsev, surreptitiously and directly contrary to his order, had had Yura included in the transport conscription; that preparations for the next entrainment had thereby been rendered impossible because Yura had not been able to type the lists, and that Yura had, meantime, sought safety in hiding.

Yakimenko looked at me loweringly and said: "Call Starodubtsev."

I did so. In about five minutes, Starodubtsev came out from his interview with Yakimenko in a condition bordering on hysteria. He would have spoken to me, but overpowering rage choked his words. He merely pointed to the door of Yakimenko's office. I went in.

"Your son will not go to the B.A.M. Project as yet; he must return to his work here. He will, however, probably have to go in the last train."

I replied: "But, Comrade Yakimenko, you promised me". . . .

"And supposing I did promise you! What kind of a treasure is your Yura anyhow?"

"For me he is a treasure."

I felt a choking in my throat, and went out.

Starodubtsev, who had evidently been listening at the door, sprang back, and his true feelings towards me found utterance in: "Treasure, ha, ha, ha!"

I grasped him by the throat, while none of the Activists stirred from their places. Starodubtsev frantically clutched my hand, and almost hung on it. When I finally loosened my grip, he sank to the floor like an empty sack. Not a sound arose from the Activists.

I felt that one more such week would drive me mad.

### *I Become a Dealer in Lives*

One train after another departed, while our position grew steadily worse. Yura's danger became increasingly greater, while our strength seemed to dwindle. After what had occurred, I could no longer trust Yakimenko's promises. Boris was insistent on immediate escape. I, on the other hand, was much afraid of it. It appeared to me tantamount to suicide; but, on the other hand, there seemed no alternative save suicide.

During the scanty hours of freedom from my labours at the U.R.Ch., I could not rest or sleep. One plan after another occurred to me, only to be rejected. I felt there must be some practicable remedy available: some simple and palpable solution—but I could not divine it, and wandered hither and thither among romantic expedients, while concrete probabilities eluded me.

Eventually, during a sleepless night, I was persuaded

to try an expedient—Hendelmann's suggestion to sound the Chairman of the Receiving Commission of the B.A.M. Project, Chekalin the Chekist. It became clear to me, in the stillness of that endless night, that Chekalin was our only hope, and also a decidedly reasonable one.

I discovered his address through devious detective activities. Chekalin lived in a Karelian hut, at the end of the village. Late at night, like a thief, I slunk across the snow to his dwelling. A peasant woman came to the door in answer to my knock, but was unwilling to open it. After about two minutes Chekalin himself appeared.

"Who is there?"

"A messenger from the U.R.C.H. for Comrade Chekalin."

The door partly opened, and the light of an electric torch fell on me.

"Are you a prisoner?"

"Yes."

"What message have you for me?" Chekalin's tones were sharp.

"Citizen Chief, I am under the urgent necessity of discussing with you a serious and important question."

"Then speak."

"Comrade Chief, I really cannot conduct a conversation like this through a half-open door."

A beam of the flashlight was focused on my face while I stood blinking, and feeling that the slightest mistake on my part might easily cost me my life.

"Are you armed?"

"No."

"Empty out your pockets."

I did so.

"Come in."



I entered. Chekalin held the flashlight between his teeth, and without lowering the weapon in his right hand, passed an evidently experienced left hand over my body.

"Step ahead."

I took two or three steps and stood irresolute.

"To the right. Step up—to the left," commanded Chekalin.

This experience was sharply reminiscent of the G.P.U. We entered a poorly furnished room containing an unpainted table. Chekalin circled it, and, still holding up his weapon, asked me, in the same sharp manner: "Well, what do you want?"

The beginning of our conversation was certainly not promising, while, nevertheless, much depended on it. I summoned all my forces to answer.

"Citizen Chief, the most recent transport trains have been composed of men who will never reach the B.A.M. Project alive."

My breath failed me.

"What about it?"

"In your position as recipient of man power, there can certainly be no advantage in filling the trains with half-dead men who will be thrown out as corpses *en route*."

"You propose?"

"I would like to show you a list of the sick people who have been entrained as supposedly healthy from the W.B.C. You have on your Committee a physician who cannot, of course, test the healthiness of all campers, but he can certainly examine those whose names are listed."

"Under what paragraphs are you confined here?"

"Paragraph 58, Divisions 10 and 11, Paragraph 59, Division 10."

"How long a sentence?"

"Eight years."

"What is prompting you to this action?"

"A number of things. In particular, my fear lest my son might also be sent to the B.A.M. Project."

"Is that the man who is working next to you?"

"Yes."

Chekalin looked at me with a piercing and inscrutable glance. My tongue clove to the roof of my parched mouth with nervousness.

"So," he said thoughtfully. Then turning aside, he thrust his weapon into its holster.

"So," he repeated, as if he were trying to make up his mind about the matter. "Tell me, this confusion with the muddled names. Are you people the ones responsible?"

"We are."

"And for what reason?"

"I was of opinion that even a Revolution can dispense with senseless casualties."

Chekalin started.

"Hm," he remarked sarcastically. "And at the time when millions of healthy men perished in the senseless Imperialistic slaughter on our front—did you act with equal intelligence at that time?"

The question was hurled at me with the sharpness of a pistol-shot.

"I was just as powerless then as now, in the face of the madness of men."

"Do you consider the Revolution madness?"

"I see no reason for trying to hide from you the sorrowful facts."

Chekalin was silent awhile.

"While your proposal might be acceptable to me, you must not rely on any mercy if you are making it on personal grounds, either for protection or any other similar purpose."

"My own position is so hopeless, that the question of mercy interests me little. The one thing that interests me is the fate of my son."

"And for what offence is he a prisoner?"

"Simply because of his associations—friendship with foreigners."

"How do you propose to carry out your plan?"

"Before the departure of each transport train I would hand over to you the list of all sick people whom the W.B.C. proposes to deliver to you as healthy ones. Obviously I cannot hand these lists to you personally. I could hide them in the privy of the U.R.Ch., inside a crack above the doorway, directly in the centre. You are at the U.R.Ch. often enough to have ready access to the lists."

"That might be possible. Is your son a participant in these ideas and proposals?"

"Yes, it was really his original idea."

"On similar grounds?"

"Yes."

"And has he made up his mind on the subject?"

"Definitely."

Chekalin seemed to relax a little.

"I wish you would answer this question. Aren't you of opinion that the G.P.U. imprisoned you without cause?"

"From the standpoint of the G.P.U.? No."

"And from your own point of view—yes?"

"There are many other points of view besides that of

the G.P.U. It scarcely seems to me worth while, at the moment, to go into these differences."

"But the Revolution is made chargeable for these expenses which you yourself have called irrational, because of Yakimenko, Starodubtsev, and their ilk. And the reason for this is that you and men of your class and type were unwilling to join in the Revolution. Why were you unwilling?"

"Starodubtsev has an advantage over me—that he's ready to obey every order. I'm not."

"You don't care to soil your hands."

"Maybe not."

"Then you may as well continue associating with Yakimenko."

"You haven't apparently a very high opinion of Yakimenko."

"Yakimenko is a careerist and a rascal," returned Chekalin curtly.

"He intends to arrive somewhere, and it seems likely that he will."

"As far as it's dependent on me, he won't. And it is dependent on me. The G.U.L.A.G. will be duly informed of the circumstances affecting the transport trains. The details relating to the corpses along the way are not essential to the records of the G.U.L.A.G."

"I agree that the details of corpses along the way have not hitherto disturbed the G.U.L.A.G."

"Yakimenko will not arrive very far," continued Chekalin. "We have rascals enough as it is—but that, after all, is no concern of yours."

"On the contrary, it concerns me very nearly. It definitely does concern me and mine."

Chekalin shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us get down to facts. The next transport train leaves in three days. Can you get me the first list the day after to-morrow?"

"I can."

"And I will find the list the day after to-morrow about ten o'clock in the evening, in the crack over the door of the U.R.CH. privy?"

"Yes."

"Good—if you deal honestly with me, if you don't use these lists for any ulterior purpose—then I will pledge my word that your son will not be sent to the B.A.M. In fact, I will guarantee it. Is there, by the way, any reason why you yourself should not be transported to the B.A.M.?"

"The paragraphs do not permit it in my case."

"That's nonsense."

"And besides that, it isn't exactly a pleasure trip."

"Nonsense. If I invite you, you won't make the journey in a cattle truck."

Unable to believe my ears, I stared at Chekalin, and did not know what to say.

"We need educated men," said Chekalin, emphasising the word 'educated'. "And we know how to value such people. It's a different story from the W.B.C."

There was a perceptible significance in Chekalin's latter remarks. While I was gathering my wits, and thinking of asking what had entitled me to the honour of this invitation, Chekalin broke in:

"We'll discuss this further. I shall want to see the lists the day after to-morrow. Meanwhile, think seriously about my proposal!"

When I had reached the open air once more I felt inclined to execute a jig. But on second thoughts, and

after all I had endured, I decided to subject the whole matter to a 'Marxian analysis'. This 'Marxian analysis' yielded quite favourable conclusions. I was, after all, proffering to render Chekalin a considerable service; not because anyone would have reproached him with the mortality occurring *en route*; but because he would have been held culpable of negligence in the matter of transport, had he permitted, without protest, the delivery of inferior articles. From the standpoint of the Soviet conscript traffic, this was an exceedingly serious offence.

### *Respite*

The family council of the Solonevich trio, otherwise known as the three musketeers, confirmed my opinion that Chekalin would not betray us. One psychological factor stood forth conspicuously. By his connection with a prisoner, and by employing this prisoner as a spy upon the Camp authorities, Chekalin would be placed in a somewhat dubious position. If he should break his word, he must realise that I might be driven to some desperate expedient similar to my first visit to him. I might be careful to preserve evidence of our criminal partnership. As a last resort, I could hand over these proofs to the Third Division, in which case Chekalin would find himself in difficulties with the W.B.C. In short, once implicated, he would have to carry the matter through to the end.

All things are relative. Hardly had the most recent peril which threatened us disappeared, than it was succeeded by feelings of hope, despite our prison labour in the U.R.C.H., and our perpetual loss of sleep through the preparation of Chekalin's lists.

Yura had simplified these lists from the beginning:

we used no names, but only the order numbers and the serial number indicating the name of the individual. These lists at once began to diminish the possibilities of transport, and Yakimenko became increasingly venomous, but at least the delayed transport gave us some small breathing space. While documents were being examined, we could find opportunities for sleep. At the same time Yakimenko sprang a surprise on me.

I was sitting at my machine and typing, while Yakimenko was in the next room, when I suddenly heard his lowered voice.

"Comrade Tverdun, put the papers of Yura Solonevich in the collection marked for Medgora; he's not to go to the B.A.M. Project."

That same evening I took an opportunity to thank Yakimenko in rather clumsy fashion. He looked up at me with a curious ironically questioning glance, and replied:

"No thanks are necessary, Comrade Solonevich." Upon which he lowered his head once more over his papers. I could never discover what prompted Yakimenko to act as he did in this matter.

### *The Child and the Frozen Pot*

A quieter life supervened, at least during the time when many of the transport plans were suspended; but, subsequently, when Yakimenko was secretly restoring to the lists the names which Chekalin had deleted, the work became again more difficult. At this juncture I had an adventure of no great importance in itself, but which, nevertheless, produced a deep impression on me.

At dawn, before the departure of the prisoners to their work, and later in the day during dinner, a few

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At dawn, before the departure of the prisoners to their work, and later in the day during dinner, a few

dozen peasant children would appear at our tents to beg for any morsels of food that might be spared. It was curious to see these children of the 'free population' appearing poorer than the prisoners; for we at least received a definite ration of bread daily, whereas the peasants lacked even this.

Yura was our chief commissary. He brought bread and other food, and likewise divided among the children whatever available scraps there were. We possessed an enormous aluminium pot, with a capacity of about ten quarts, which had been the companion of our previous attempts to escape, and was to accompany us in our third endeavour. In this pot Yura collected all that remained of the cabbage soup, which was usually prepared from partly spoiled white cabbage and herrings' heads. . . . I was never able to ascertain what happened to the herrings to which these heads had belonged. Very few of the prisoners had the temerity to eat this soup, and consequently it was usually given to the children. Many of the prisoners also shared their bread rations with the poor little devils.

I can no longer remember exactly how this happened. Yura and I did not leave the U.R.CH. for two or three days together, while our neighbours continued to pour their remnants of food into our pot. On one occasion, when I managed to leave the U.R.CH. and was on my way to dinner and to stretch my legs a little, I noticed that our pot was full to the brim and completely frozen. I decided to carry the pot into the kitchen and set it on the stove to thaw, after which I intended to empty it of its contents and to put our rations of porridge in the pot instead.

I seized the pot and went out of the tent. It was almost

nightfall—a piercing wind howled through the telegraph wires and drove snow dust into one's eyes. No one was to be seen near the tents. The crowd of children usually present at dinner time had disappeared. Suddenly a shadowy little figure dashed out from behind a heap of snow, and a hoarse, almost inaudible childish voice piped out:

"If there's anything left, please, please give it to me."

It was a little girl of about eleven years of age, whose eyes gleamed hungrily from beneath tumbled hair, while the little voice pleaded automatically, as though from habit, and almost without expression.

"Please, please, give me something."

"I have only ice in the pot."

"Is it frozen soup?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Do give it to me. I'll warm it up at once, and then I can pour it out."

The little girl's voice expressed haste, greediness, and fear of a refusal. I stood there undecided. The child clutched the pot, and pulled up its torn little peasant shirt, under which were only the naked projecting ribs of its half-starved body. She pressed the pot against her naked frame, like a mother with her child, gathered her tattered garment around it, and sat down in the snow.

I was so surprised as to be unable to anticipate what the child would do next. For a moment I thought of the maternal instinct, appearing like a miracle in the starved body of this little maiden. I turned automatically into the tent to find another receptacle for our daily porridge.

In every man's life there are moments of self-distrust and perplexity. I lived through such an experience as I

searched on my knees for another vessel, while I realised in a flash that the poor little girl actually proposed to melt, with the meagre warmth of her half-starved, half-frozen body, a twenty pound lump of ice composed of veritable pigs' fodder. It was, of course, utterly impossible.

I rose and knocked my head against a beam, and, half stunned by the blow, rushed angrily out of the tent to find the child still sitting with chattering teeth on the same spot.

"Oh! Please don't take it away from me," she cried out.

I gathered her up, together with the pot, and carried her into the tent. I hardly knew what I was doing. I remember saying something, but it was probably unintelligible. The little girl tore herself fearfully out of my grasp and rushed to the entrance of the tent. I caught her, however, and sat her down on the bed. Feverishly, with trembling hands, I began to grope about for food. At length I found some scraps and a half-ration of Yura's bread. The little girl had never expected such gifts. She grabbed a slice of bread and started to ram it into her mouth. Tears of alarm still ran down her poor dirty little cheeks.

Meanwhile, I stood before her, gloomy and irresolute, furious with the world and myself in particular. How could we grown-up Russians, thirty million men, have ever allowed things to reach such a pass with our poor little children? Why had we not fought our fight to the finish? We men of the Intelligentsia at least knew what the French Revolution had brought forth. We could well have imagined what a revolution on the same scale would mean in our own land. Why had not every man seized a rifle? In that moment I had a piercing vision of the full meaning of class war and revolution.

What has become of the property owners? Of the capitalists? Of the professors?

The landed proprietors are in London. The capitalists in the Commissariat of Industry. The professors in the Academy of Sciences. Deprived of their villas and their limousines, it is true, but still alive.

But what has become of our youth, our boys and our girls? They should have been thought of first, for in them is the future of our country. Shame on us for having forgotten them! On their little skeletons—millions of skeletons of poor starved children—the Socialist Paradise is being erected.

I thought of Karamazov's question about a ticket for life. No, if the Soviets should succeed a hundred times in building their paradise on the foundations of these little skeletons, I still shouldn't want to live in it.

I remember a portrait of Lenin, which showed him like Christ surrounded by children: "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

I have seen many horrible things under the Soviets, many things worse than the little girl with the frozen pot. Much of it is buried in oblivion, but I can never forget that little child. That remembrance remains for me a symbol—a symbol of what Russia has become.

### *The night in the U.R.CH.*

Day followed day, transport trains succeeded one another. The equipment became steadily worse. The Activists in the Post Office persistently stole our packages. After all, they were no longer running *any risks*: everyone was bound for the B.A.M. in any case. Even our colleagues of the U.R.CH. departed one after another. Tverdun, who had played a minor part in the campaign

against us, drank away his last uniform amidst the universal demoralisation, and subsequently wept over my shoulder as he lamented his wasted life. He had formerly been a Polish Komsomol member, who had arrived in the Soviet Union by illegal means from Vilna, and had, for some unknown transgression, been sentenced to five years in Camp.

Even Starodubtsev ceased to trouble us, and busied himself in devious ways, seeking immunity for his numerous irregularities. I later learned, with considerable regret, that Starodubtsev had managed somehow to escape being sent to the B.A.M. Project.

Our strength continued to diminish. Day by day I seemed to grow less and less competent. Yura and I finished our work one night about 2 a.m. The U.R.CH. room was empty.

"Go to your tent, Yura, and get some sleep."

"No, Dad, in a few minutes we can leave together."

I had still about five minutes' work to finish. As I drew the last sheets from my typewriter, I noticed that Yura had slipped to the floor, and was leaning against the wall, fast asleep. I did not care to wake him. There seemed no point in carrying him to his tent. There was a bunk near the stove in the room, which we all used for an occasional nap when we had half an hour to spare, even Yakimenko himself. To lay Yura on the bunk, where he could sleep on, warm and comfortable, seemed the proper course. I could not let him remain on the floor, on account of the draughts and the snowflakes already visible on his eyelashes.

I leaned over and lifted him up. The first thought that occurred to me was his unusual weight. Then I realised that it was not so much his weight as my own

feebleness. Yura's weight, perhaps one hundred and fifty pounds, was actually a greater burden for me than three hundred would formerly have been.

The bunk was about six feet from the ground and I soon found I was unable to lift Yura high enough. I therefore lowered him once more to the ground and tried to wake him, but it proved impossible. It was not sleep so much as physical collapse.

At length I succeeded in rousing him, pulled a large chest against the bunk, raised Yura once more in my arms, mounted the chest, supported myself with both hands against the edge of the bunk, and let Yura roll down into it like a package. In falling, he unfortunately struck the tiled inlaid headrest of the bunk. A thin trickle of blood ran down his face. I used a small piece of cigarette paper to stanch the wound, but Yura never stirred. His face looked like that of a man dying after a long and serious illness. An occasional flush only served to emphasise the bluish pallor of his features. Deep circles under his eyes, his pointed nose, his parched lips, almost seemed to foreshadow his end. The sight was so dreadful that I bent over him and listened for his heart-beats. They were neither strong nor rhythmical, but they were there. For a few moments I was overcome. My head swam and my legs gave way beneath me. How welcome it would have been to be able to lie down and fall asleep for ever on the spot, without the necessity for further action. But finally I mastered the weakness, left the U.R.CH., tottering like a drunkard, and managed to stumble down the stairs.

On the way I thought about the last list for Chekalin, which was to cover the trainload due to leave to-morrow, or rather to-day. No doubt Chekalin had already seized

this list, as well as the previous one. But suppose he hadn't? Nonsense, why shouldn't he have taken it? There was a faint hope he hadn't taken it? It was our record list covering one hundred and forty-seven men. Should I leave it in its crack until morning? By daylight it might perhaps be discovered, and then what would happen?

My steps grew uncertain, and finally I climbed up the stairs once more. I opened the door of the indescribably foul U.R.CH. privy, and felt around with my hand. The list was still there. I struck a match.

Yes, that was our list, and it contained some notes from Chekalin—a most valuable document for all emergencies—careless enough of Chekalin. Why hadn't Chekalin taken the list along with him? Had he been prevented by lack of time or opportunity? I ought really to take the list to Chekalin myself.

But the thought of having to drag myself a mile and a quarter across the snow to his hut chilled me in prospect. Yet if I did not go, these hundred and forty-seven men would have to depart for the B.A.M. Project on the morrow. I started for the steps once more.

From the windows of the U.R.CH. ribbons of dim light fell across the snow. Beyond them a polar blizzard was howling. A mile and a quarter! I'd never do it. . . . The B.A.M., the list, and those poor devils! They would die anyhow, if not on their way to the B.A.M., then somewhere or other in the Swamps. Better make for my tent, with a good fire crackling in the stove, and wrap myself up in a couple of blankets, as Yura was not using his, go to sleep, and dream about some country where shootings were unknown, the B.A.M. did not exist, nor little girls with frozen pots, and the peaked



white face of my son shone with ruddy health. I might even dream of some strange existence which might be the simplest possible, and free, incredibly free. So what about the list?

Not without some difficulty did I at last realise that I was sitting on the bottom step of the stairs, with my legs stretched in front of me, and the snow was already beginning to cover them.

I jumped up in a great fright. To perish in such a stupid fashion, to freeze on the road between the U.R.Ch. and my tent, as though moonstruck? To the devil with the whole business! I'll go on my way to Chekalin. If he's asleep, I'll wake him. The deuce take him!

### *The Last of the Mohicans*

I started on my way. I staggered in the darkness across the snow, afterwards collided with a quickset hedge, with the shelter of which I was able to make further progress. I had no thought for anything but making the journey somehow, without losing my way or perishing in the snow.

A sudden challenge: "Halt, hands up"! left me unmoved. I told the owner of the voice to go to the devil, and dragged myself further. The voice shrieked a second time:

"Is it you?"

With equal intelligence, I answered: "In all probability it is."

A figure with a revolver suddenly appeared out of the storm, and asked:

"Where are you making for? For my house?" Then for the first time I recognised Chekalin's voice.

"Yes, I was on my way to you."

"Are you bringing the list?"

"Yes."

"It's a good thing that I met you. I've just arrived, and was on my way to get it. I'm glad you've brought it along. But good heavens! You're supposed to be an intelligent man and write like this! The devil alone could read it: not only the names, but the numbers are almost illegible."

I admitted that it was possible for handwriting to be still worse, although very seldom.

"Let's go over to my house. There we may be able to make something of it."

Chekalin turned round and disappeared in the darkness. I was able to follow him although with great difficulty. We had to wade through numerous snow banks, stumbling over tree stumps. At last we managed to drag ourselves to his hut. We climbed the dark creaking staircase. Chekalin kindled some lights.

"Look here," he said in his harsh, irritated manner. "What's this supposed to be? What's this figure—a 4, a 1, a 7, or a 9? Unreadable. Here's a pencil. Sit down and correct this, so that I can read it."

I took the pencil and sat down, my hands quivering with cold and hunger. The pencil trembled between my fingers and the figures swam before my eyes.

"You certainly have let yourself run down," remarked Chekalin critically, but his voice softened a little. I made some sort of reply.

"Give it to me, I'll do the correcting myself. You need only tell me the meaning of your scrawls."

There weren't so many vile scribblings as there had appeared to be at first glance. After everything had been deciphered, Chekalin asked me:

"Are those all the sick people in the prospective trainload?"

I refused to commit myself. "As to whether these are all of them, I can't tell you positively. I do not even know whether there are any healthy people left for this excursion."

"Why haven't you included all the sick people in the list then?"

"Do you realise, Comrade Chekalin, that even the prettiest girl has nothing to offer when she has had no sleep for weeks."

Chekalin looked at my trembling hands.

"Isn't there anybody in the U.R.CH. that you can trust besides yourself?"

I looked at Chekalin in amazement. "Forgive me for the nonsense I have been talking. How many healthy people do you think there are still left here? In my opinion there are none. More emphatically still, that's my brother's opinion also."

"He's a first-rate chap, that brother of yours," said Chakalin decidedly. "Even his colleagues of the Third Division are afraid of him. So it's your impression that Yakimenko has completely exhausted his reserves?"

"More than exhausted them. My son has just informed me of a very neat trick. In the last U.R.CH. lists there are included names which you have already refused twice.

Chekalin raised his eyebrows. "Oh! that's what is happening. Are you certain of your facts?"

"You probably still have the old lists. Suppose we compare them. I can remember a number of names."

We compared lists. Chekalin, even without my assistance, noted a number of these repetitions.

"So Yakimenko has now countenanced a complete fraud. That implies that he really has no healthy people left. That's a deuce of a situation . . . that marks the end of the transport trains. I can't be responsible for those heavy losses *en route*."

"Are the losses *en route* really so great?"

I expected Chekalin to answer me as he had done previously: "That's none of your business." To my astonishment, however, he shrugged his shoulders nervously, and replied:

"The losses have been immense. And while I think of it," he suddenly broke in, "what's your answer to my proposition? Do you want to accompany me to the B.A.M.?"

"If you will excuse me, I'd rather not."

"Why?"

"There are two basic reasons: the first is, I'm not far from Leningrad here, and accessible to visitors; the second is, if I attach myself to you, I shall have to depend automatically on your protection."

Chekalin nodded affirmatively.

"You're a Party man, consequently involved in all mobilisations and transportations. Your protection will in the natural course of events disappear some day, and I shall be left to depend on the mercy, or lack of it, of people to whom I shall be merely a nuisance."

"Your first reason is sound enough. Your second is foolish. After all, the first thing I shall do in the G.P.U. Division of the B.A.M. Project is to lay bare the whole story of these lists, of your part in their preparation, and of Yakimenko."

"Thanks. That would mean that the G.P.U. Division of the B.A.M. Project would take advantage of the

first opportunity to inscribe my name in the list of the missing."

"What do you mean by that?"

I looked at Chekalin with astonishment and pity: so simple a soul, and so little understanding.

"Because, they would argue, this story makes it sufficiently clear that here is a fellow who is willing to show his teeth on occasion, and yet who is not one of us. Yesterday he betrayed the U.R.C.H., to-morrow it may be our turn."

Chekalin asked: "Have you never worked in the G.P.U.?"

"No, on the contrary, the G.P.U. has worked on me."

Chekalin lit a cigarette, and watched a cold breeze from the window blow the smoke about. I determined to clarify things once for all.

"What I have referred to is not the exclusive system of the G.P.U. A man by the name of Machiavelli wrote about all this long ago."

"Who is Machiavelli?"

"A Renaissance Italian who published what might be described as a primer for Bolsheviks some five hundred years ago."

Chekalin's forehead wrinkled. "I suppose that life hasn't, after all, changed much for the better in five hundred years," he remarked, as though he wanted to explain things to me. "And until we have liquidated the capitalist system, things are not likely to improve. As to the B.A.M. Project, perhaps you are right, after all, though I think not entirely. Nevertheless, our very best people are being sent there."

I made no effort to determine what might be the significance of the phrase 'our best people'. It was indeed

time for me to be on my way, before I was told to go. But it was so hard to get up. I sat there as in a haze, and had the greatest difficulty to prevent myself falling asleep on the hard stool on which I was sitting. However, I made an effort to rise.

"Stay there till you are warm," said Chekalin, and offered me a cigarette. He changed his position, his pose reminding me in startling fashion of the little girl with the frozen pot. In this attitude his face, his tired hands on the table, expressed a sombre hopelessness, fatigue, and loneliness. It was the countenance of a man accustomed to live, as the saying is . . . "With his teeth clenched." They are ruthlessly trodden under foot, these hardened party fanatics, enthusiasts, and jailers, at once executioners and victims, builders and destroyers. The bleak years pass . . . enthusiasm wanes. The Communist *autos-da-fé* become ever more oppressive to the personal conscience. What a sombre horizonless existence is reserved for these enthusiasts! Willy-nilly, and without reward, they travel near and far, to the Solovetsky Islands, to mid-Asia, always enclosed in the political isolation of the G.P.U.

Chekalin raised his head, intercepting my searching glance. I did not lower my eyes. A drawn and painful smile flickered across his face.

"Are you trying to guess how old I am?"

The question surprised me. I thought it prudent to reply: "Perhaps forty-five."

Chekalin shrugged his shoulders. "So that's what you think. I'm really only thirty-four. There's the life of a Chekist for you!"

A twisted smile crossed his lips, and he added: "'Hang-man', as you have put it."

"I said nothing of the sort."

"Not to me, but no doubt to others, or at least you thought as much."

It would have been idle on my part to pretend a denial.

"There are different kinds of hangmen. There are those who, from love of their craft, continue living. There are those who, driven forward by conviction, end in self-destruction. I am inclined to think that Yakimenko, for instance, troubles himself very little about the losses in transport."

"And why do you think that I am disturbed about such matters?"

"If not, why do you take the trouble to drag yourself over to the U.R.CH. at night in order to get my lists? Yakimenko would never do that. Besides, not all are blind. If I hadn't known something of you, I should never have come to you with the lists in the first place."

"That is interesting. Well, now, frankness in return for frankness!"

I pricked up my ears, but in spite of the promising introduction Chekalin remained silent, seeming to be trying to make up his mind about something, and, finally, with an air of having come to a decision, he asked: "Don't you think that Yakimenko may have some suspicions about these lists of yours?"

I became decidedly uneasy. Yakimenko might be suspicious of me, and if rumour of this had already reached Chekalin, it was probable that matters would take a most serious turn.

"Yakimenko issued an order, several days ago, that my son was not to be sent to the B.A.M."

"Is that so? That's curious enough."

We looked at each other, mystified.

"What do you actually know about Yakimenko's suspicions?"

"Nothing positively definite. It's difficult to say. Just certain indications."

"Why, then, hasn't Yakimenko had us 'liquidated'?"

"That's not quite so simple. Even the Camps have their regulations. You are naturally aware that these regulations aren't always strictly observed, nevertheless they exist. And when one is dealing with a man who knows how to bare his teeth on occasions—and you are all three of that kind—in the case of such a man, liquidation is not so simple. Yakimenko is a careful fellow. Moreover, one can't be certain that you may not have powerful connections. To sum up, in the G.P.U. some discretionary power is reserved with regard to defiance of regulations."

"Particularly in relation to those who have connections?"

Chekalin assented a little reluctantly, and continued: "In such cases some consideration may be given."

Chekalin's observations directed attention to the necessity for reviewing carefully the whole situation: particularly whether it might not, after all, be wiser, at the present juncture, to accept his invitation for the B.A.M. trip, rather than to remain in Yakimenko's charge.

It was a moment of dejection, of temptation even to betray our cherished determination, but it passed. At all costs, that must remain our paramount intention; and, somehow or other, we would deal with Yakimenko. It wasn't even worth while to consider my joining the B.A.M.

"Comrade Chekalin, there is, after all, no sense in talking about the observance of the regulations."



"I'll answer you with another question. Isn't it, after all, your own fault that you remain at the mercy of Yakimenko, instead of sitting with your peers?"

"I'll answer your question. Yakimenko is willing, for the sake of his career, to do anything required without scruple. I am not willing."

"Yakimenko is only a small cog of an enormous machine. If each component part is to have the privilege of independent action . . ."

"I'm afraid that you also incline to your own decisions. So did I. We are, after all, the outcome of individual initiative. Only when we arrive at the stage where we can regard people as either men or materials, are we able to come to a different conclusion."

Chekalin shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"You and your rotten individualism! People like you have no future."

That annoyed me: why no future? In some other country there would always be a future for me.

"Comrade Chekalin," I answered irritably, "there's no more future for you than for me. As the Revolution progresses, the powers that be will need more and more men who don't think and have no conscience. They'll need Starodubtsevs and Yakimenkos. For that reason there's no future for men like you, unless you can consider transport trains and your present outhouse as a future. You have really just as little future as the old Leninists. You and your kind are dedicated to destruction like Lenin's Old Guard. The fact that I've been imprisoned a little ahead of you signifies little. There's perhaps this difference, that I have no cause to be conscience-stricken. Whereas you have reasons in plenty. That's our joint tragedy, and the tragedy of Bolshevism as a whole. The

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whole machine, under full steam, is headed for destruction. As to which side will perish first makes no difference and will not check the disastrous consequence."

"Oh, ho!" replied Chekalin, raising his eyebrows. "You seem to be developing a whole new political programme."

I realised that I was being carried away by my theme—in my intensity, if not the actual words, but that it was too late to retreat. I continued:

"It was you, and not I, who broached the subject. After all, we are not talking in barracks and in the presence of colleagues, or before impressionable masses. Is there any reason why I should plead injured innocence in your presence, especially considering that I'm serving an eight-year sentence?"

It seemed as though Chekalin was just the least bit ashamed of the Chekist feeling which coloured his comment.

"Have you any idea how you happened to get this curious sentence of eight years instead of five or ten?"

"Apparently it was assumed that just eight years were required to 'reconstruct' me into a respectable Soviet enthusiast, providing, of course, that I could last out as long as eight years."

"Naturally you'll pull through. I'm even inclined to think that you may make a career for yourself."

"I wasn't interested in a career in Moscow, and as to a career in a Concentration Camp, you'll have to excuse me from any such ambition. Probably I'll manage to pull through. As it is, it's all a waste of time, and my life is ruined in any case, not entirely in consequence of the Concentration Camp. Your life has been ruined equally; for you're really one of the Last of the Mohicans, Com-

rade Chekalin, one who still pictures an ideal state of Bolshevism. It's not really worth discussion—the expression on your face is answer enough.”

“May I ask what you're able to read in my face?”

“Quite enough. For example, your unshaven cheeks. Yakimenko has a daily sitting with the Camp barber, is shaved and sprayed with perfume. You, on the contrary, haven't been shaved for a fortnight, and scorn the use of scent.”

“It's impossible to do one's work well and take adequate care of one's appearance here,” Chekalin replied.

“I haven't said that Yakimenko is incompetent, but there are times when the right kind of man has no time to spare for shaving or manicuring. The devil knows you live in a regular pigsty, an unheated one withal. Yakimenko would never live in that fashion, not even Starodubtsev, at least not unless it were unavoidable. You are, after all, in a position to command the barber and adequate heating for yourself, if you care to take the trouble.”

Chekalin was silent. I was conscious that my exhausted condition made me irritable, and that it was high time for me to leave. I got up.

“Do you insist on going so soon?”

“Yes, I must get some sleep. There will be more lists to-morrow.”

Chekalin rose painfully from his stool.

“There will be no lists required to-morrow,” he remarked with determination. “I propose to inspect the entire train to-morrow, and to withhold my consent. And, anyhow, I shall put a stop to any further transport.”

He held out his hand, I shook it, and Chekalin continued to hold my hand in his.

"In any event," Chekalin said, in decided, somewhat excited tones, "in any event, Comrade Solonevich, I have you to thank for these lists, on behalf, moreover, of that same Communist Party of which you have so low an opinion. You'll have to realise, sooner or later, that, if the party does not spare individuals, neither does it spare itself."

"Speak for yourself only—I'll find it easier to believe you then. All kinds of men invoke the name of the Party, just as Christ's name was taken by Inquisitors as well as Apostles."

"Hm," pronounced Chekalin, thoughtfully. Meanwhile we continued to stand ridiculously enough with hands clasped at the door. Chekalin appeared undecided. I pressed his hand once more, and moved to go.

"Comrade Solonevich," said Chekalin, "you have no time for sleep, and when you do have a moment, you are unable to sleep after all. That's the abominable position we are in here."

I looked round the large, bare, cold, barn-like room, and then at Chekalin. He looked equally forlorn.

"Have you left your family behind you in the East?" Chekalin smiled bitterly:

"Why talk of one's family, considering the work we have to do? You must go. There'll be no lists for you to write to-morrow. I will not accept a further single convoy. So let's sit down and chat a bit. I've some brandy, and even a bit of something to eat. What do you say?"

### *The All-Russian Platform*

I was not immediately attracted by the offer of cognac, but very definitely inclined towards food. Hunger had become so familiar a companion to me, that it no longer

produced any especially painful sensations, but the desire to eat was ever present. For a moment such an unusual invitation appeared suspicious; but when I looked at Chekalin I realised that a refusal on my part would be tantamount to intensifying his actual and spiritual loneliness.

I breathed: "Brandy, that wouldn't be bad."

Chekalin's face cleared. "That's good. Let us sit down and gossip awhile. Just one moment."

He reached under the bed and pulled out an old trunk, from which he extracted a bottle of brandy and a large tin of caviare.

"That's caviare from the B.A.M. Project," explained Chekalin. "One can't come to a strange district totally unprovided for. To be able to carry on one's work, one must have at least a minimum of food. After all, it may quite well happen that, when I refuse to permit the transport trains, I shall get no more food from the local administration."

Chekalin brought out some vessels from a shaky old cupboard, and wiped them with a scrap of old newspaper. Further inspection of the cupboard revealed a pound loaf of dry bread, which he laid on the table and inspected doubtfully.

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid it isn't fit to eat. There doesn't seem to be anything else left, and I don't like to wake up our hostess. I think I'll have a look round myself. I may be able to find something."

He went downstairs. I remained seated trying to assemble my scattered thoughts and bring my weary mind to bear on the recent conversation, to find some reasonable explanation of it.

I wondered, too, how many completely deluded Com-

munists there might be, in our holy Russia, possessed by entirely alien forces, silently and with clenched teeth, pursuing the road to destruction, and still in the depths of their souls cherishing the dream of idealistic beauty—that beauty which as the product of the Revolution is some day to possess the whole world. This idealism may not be mentioned; it must be imprisoned in the depths of one's soul; it must never be discussed with people like Starodubtsev. Yet in the fertile depths of the Russian soul, quickened perhaps by good Russian vodka, this same idealism may leap into sudden vitality. How often in my life, and in that of the Soviets, have I myself drunk a toast to this very idealism.

For an instant again I harboured the suspicion that Chekalin was minded to betray me; but what was there, after all, to betray? and then I felt convinced that his invitation arose out of sheer friendliness and a sense of his loneliness.

My thoughts ranged elsewhere. Once again I was in the railway carriage No. 13, my hands bound and swollen. The old rage against myself for having played the fool surged up afresh, and a boundless longing for what had been and would alas! never be again.

At one of the stops during that journey one of my Chekist guards had brought me, contrary to all expectation, a really decent meal. I remembered that I had in my knapsack a flask of spirits, for which I hankered. I said to the Chekist: "I would like to have a last drink."

"Oh, nonsense," replied the guard. "You will have plenty of time and opportunities for more drinks. However, I'll see."

I heard him in the next compartment say: "Comrade

Dobrotin, the prisoner asks permission to have a drink."

The round, sleepy face of Dobrotin appeared and looked me over carefully.

"Are you likely to create any disturbance when you are drunk?"

"I never get drunk. I would like one drink and then try to sleep."

"It is all right as far as I am concerned."

The Chekist guard brought me my knapsack, and withdrew the flask and glass. "How will you have it—half and half? Take a couple of drinks, then you'll soon fall asleep."

I enjoyed two drinks, while one of the Chekists brought me my travelling robe, and folded it under my head.

"Try to sleep. There's no use in torturing yourself needlessly. No, I'm sorry. We have no power to remove your handcuffs, but put your hands here, and it will be more comfortable for you."

... An idyll . . . !

Chekalin returned. He carried some enormous cooked turnips on a wooden plate and some sauerkraut on another.

"There isn't any bread," he said with an embarrassed smile, "but the turnips aren't bad after all."

"Not in the least bad," I burst out. "Our comrades the proletarians of all countries haven't even got turnips."

I felt at once that the remark had been the reverse of tactful. Chekalin suddenly stopped dead, the vegetable in his hand.

"Pardon me, Comrade Chekalin," I said frankly, "that remark escaped me unawares. I had intended to say something witty regarding our Camp luxuries."



Chekalin suppressed a sigh, set the turnips on the table, and poured out some brandy for both of us.

"Well, then, Comrade Solonevich, here's to the future, to the bloodless Revolution. Each of us shall drink to his own conception—I to the Revolution itself—and you to the bloodless one."

"Is there any such?"

"Let's hope the World Revolution will prove bloodless," Chekalin smiled ironically.

"And won't you drink to the common Russian Revolution?" I asked.

"Comrade Solonevich," said Chekalin solemnly, "don't forecast any further misfortune. You may end by looking back with regret to the Stalin period. I can see that you won't drink to the World Revolution, and I'm equally unwilling to drink to a further Russian Revolution. Meanwhile, the cognac is waiting. Let's drink to whatever we have in common."

The brandy was splendid. It came from an old cellar in Armenia. We helped ourselves to caviare with wooden spoons. A piece fell on the table from Chekalin's spoon. Mechanically, he began to pick up the single grains.

"The third Revolution—what is there to hide in the thought? There is nothing to hide. We know as a matter of course that three-quarters of the population expects another Revolution and the destruction of the Soviets. There's stupidity for you. It is stupid, not only because we have reserves of strength to prevent that Revolution, but because we have with Stalin a real future. On the other hand, a counter-revolution would imply Fascism, dictatorship from without, transformation of the country into a great colony, something like India. How can anyone fail to see that? One can't, of course, expect any

understanding from the peasants, but what about the Intelligentsia? Can you imagine yourself taking refuge with some uniformed trade union commission, and asking for protection against the American bourgeoisie? Life is bad enough to-day, but under such conditions it would be intolerable. There would be nothing to look forward to. But as things are now, in two or three years, or five at the most, you'll see everything blossoming."

"Were you, perhaps, in the habit of reading *Pravda* or *Izvestia* in 1927 or 1928?"

Chekalin looked at me with astonishment: "Of course I read the papers. Why?"

"Well, this is nothing very special, but a friend of mine who was a great joker happened last year to attend an assembly in Moscow when the question of an appropriation was under discussion: I believe it was the appropriation for the second Five-Year Plan. My friend mounted the platform and read a leading article from *Pravda* which was written at the beginning of the *first* Five-Year Plan. It described how happy everything and everyone would be by the time the first Five-Year Plan was completed."

Chekalin gazed at me without comprehending, and inquired interestedly: "And what happened then?"

"Nothing extraordinary. He was seized and imprisoned. To-day he's in the Concentration Camp on the Vishera."

Chekalin looked somewhat vexed. "But that's a despicable point of view—dread of work and sacrifice. We declare openly that sacrifices are inevitable. Moreover, we know exactly for what purpose we demand sacrifices, and we are ourselves ever ready to make them." So saying, Chekalin refilled our glasses, while his face assumed an expression of fixed determination.

"We advance in spite of mistakes and mishaps; we advance continuously towards the noblest goal that mankind has ever set before itself. And all you other people, instead of helping us, sit back and resort to continual sabotage."

"I can't say that I find sitting back especially comfortable."

"I do not mean you personally. I'm talking of the Intelligentsia as a whole. It is true enough we cannot do without you, and yet most of you are rascals. You have grown up at the expense of the people: you have completed your studies at the cost of the workers. Meanwhile, the people depended on you men of the Intelligentsia for a better future, for the fight against evil, against exploitation, against superstition. The ideal of a finer humanity beckoned to you, but you did not respond. When it came to the work of creation, you proved cowardly: with your tails between your legs you ran to fellows like Kolchak, Wrangel, and Deterding. You muddied the water wherever you could; you left us alone to rely on the half-baked, the Starodubtsevs, and the illiterate. And what are the Starodubtsevs accomplishing? They are destroying thousands and hundreds of thousands, and you, men of the Intelligentsia, are wasting your time on little homœopathic lists, and thinking to yourselves: After all, what excellent fellows we are. Oh, you say, I won't sell myself for less than a million at least, and I won't wash my country's dirty linen. You need a million so as to avoid the dirty washing, and to be able to keep your hands clean and soft. And all that, the devil take you, gives you a peculiar pride in yourselves. You maintain that it was not you who lanced the suppurating ulcers on the body of the old Russia, not you who spread the four-letter

words, and yet it was *you*, and you only. It was you who said that the Czar was a fool, the merchant a scoundrel, the general an old woman. Why did you say these things? I ask you."

The voice of Chekalin again took on a sharp and cutting tone. "I ask you, why did you say these things? Were you really fools enough to believe that the merchant would surrender his capital, the Czar his power, the generals their decorations, without further ado, without giving battle, without a fight, without casualties on every side? Did you really believe in a fool's paradise, to which you incited the masses without anticipating intervening attacks from no-accounts? It was *you* who aroused the masses, and who, when they had been aroused, sold the pass and betrayed them. Socialists? The devil take you! Parasites is all you ever were."

Chekalin's voice rose to a shriek as he brandished his vegetable sandwich, and unnoticed by him caviare scattered to all sides. At last he calmed down and continued more quietly: "Forgive me for behaving like a common scold. You know that I don't mean you personally. Shall we have another drink?"

We drank.

"No, I did not mean to be personal. That would have been unfair. Why don't you answer me?"

"No doubt there is a simple answer; but neither accusation nor answer is my direct concern. You see, I was never for a single moment a Socialist!"

Chekalin stared at me in utter confusion. His whole philippic had been directed against a non-existent adversary.

"I beg your pardon, I had no idea. What then were you?"

"I was a monarchist. That's on record with the G.P.U. So there's no obligation on me to be in any sense bashful about it."

It was clear that Chekalin felt that his rage against the Socialists had placed him in an indefensible position. Puzzled, he continued: "But listen. I've seen your papers. You're of peasant descent, or aren't your papers genuine?"

"My papers are perfectly correct. Only I must warn you there's nothing to be gained by class analysis. I'm just as familiar with Marx as Bucharin is, but that will get us nowhere."

Chekalin shrugged his shoulders. "As far as that goes, monarchy is, for me, the same as the fourth dimension. I can understand the aristocratic landed proprietors. Theirs was a class interest. But what did the monarchy mean to you?"

"Much. Principally this, that the monarchy seemed to me the only stable foundation for the life of the State. Not too solid, but nevertheless the only foundation available."

Chekalin began to recover from his confusion and to look at me with obvious curiosity, much as a professor might examine an interesting fossil. "So you think it was the only possible foundation? Wouldn't that mean that to your mind we have cut ourselves adrift from the groundwork and are in full cry to hell?"

"Why not make an end of phrases? We two alone here do not have to think of the masses. The idea of a World Revolution has very evidently exploded. Well then, in what direction do you think we are flying?"

"In the direction of a Socialist State in a single country," said Chekalin, though his voice seemed to indicate little inward conviction.

"Don't you think, rather, that we're being brought distinctly nearer to an appalling Asiatic despotism than to any form of Socialism? And how many people will still be slaughtered during the transition stage by machine-guns? And isn't it true that, eventually, there'll only be two real Socialists left in all Russia—Stalin and Kaganovich?"

"That, if you'll pardon me, is a foolish question. Nothing can be achieved without sacrifice. You mention machine-guns—what about them? There was a time when it was necessary to persuade the peasants by the threat of bayonets to plant potatoes. Human life may be rated at too high a figure. When the Government builds a railway, it unavoidably sacrifices individuals. It has even been statistically demonstrated that a certain number of human lives have to be sacrificed for every mile of railway. From your point of view, it would be better not to build railways. What's to be done? It's the same story with our transport trains. Of course there are difficulties. You, for example, have succeeded in slightly lowering the percentage of casualties, but, taken as a whole, the saving is a trifle. Any commander who, in the midst of battle, is concentrating on the smallest possible casualties instead of victory, ought to be turned into a shepherd boy. You keep on talking about the brutalities of the Revolution—an empty word. Brutalities remain brutalities only while they are purposeless. When, however, you reach your goal, they become a sacred sacrifice. An army which has lost ten per cent of its men in battle without achieving its objective has suffered losses in vain, but if the losses amounted to ninety per cent, and the battle were won, the casualties are justified, historically speaking. The same thing is true of us. We're not thinking of the losses

on the road, but of the final victory. Retreat is not in our dictionary. Nor do we blench at sacrifices. But, if we fail to reach our goal of the Socialist State by a mere inch, all we have done will be nothing more than atrocities. The idea of the Socialist State would be discredited for ever. So for us there's no standing still. Ten millions more, twenty millions more, what of them? There's no retreat, for us there's only advance. But," he added, "let's have another?"

I nodded.

Chekalin refilled our glasses, and we clinked glasses in silence. "Yes," I said, "you're half right; there is, in truth, no retreat. On the other hand, you must admit that there's nothing in sight for the future. The good Lord never created men for the purposes of the Socialist State. That may be an uncomfortable saying, but it's true. Man retains the identical instincts that he has possessed since the days of the Roman Empire. The old Roman law was based on the assumption that man was, before all else, *paterfamilias*. That is to say, that his primary interest concerned his family."

"The philosophy of bourgeois egotism!"

"It is not philosophy, but biology. That's how man is built. He has no wings, more's the pity, and even if you cut off his legs he still won't be able to fly. Try for a moment to retrace the years of Revolution—wherever there has been Communism there has also been famine. Where there was one hundred per cent Communism there was one hundred per cent famine. Life only begins to develop at the point where Communism retreats: N.E.P., private gardens, domestic labour. In Communist fields not even grass will grow. This seems to me to be one of the limited number of axioms we possess."

"Yes, the vestiges of capitalist consciousness in the masses have proved to be much deeper seated than we anticipated. The transformation of humanity is a very slow process."

"And do you really hope to transform humanity?"

"Yes, we're going to produce a new type of socialised humanity," said Chekalin, as if he were addressing a meeting—confident in manner, but without profound conviction.

I suddenly became enraged: "Transformation? Or as the Church used to say in such cases, driving out the old Adam. My God, what nonsense all that is! The transformation of mankind has been attempted by far more widespread and important organisations than those of the Communists, and in vain."

"For instance?"

"Religion for instance, and religion had far greater advantages."

"Religion—advantages over Communism?"

"Naturally. Religion has this tremendous advantage, that its promises are only supposed to be realised in the Hereafter. Think that over! But your promises can very easily be tested. The more so that you haven't been in too great a hurry. The Socialist Paradise has already been announced by you at least five times: after the fall of the bourgeois administration, after the expropriation of the factories, after the defeat of the White Armies, after the first Five-Year Plan, and now after the second Five-Year Plan."

"That's all quite true—there have been poor results so far. On the other hand, it's not a myth that we're proclaiming, but a reality."

"But tell me this, were Paradise and Hell myths to the



people of the Middle Ages or realities? Moreover, their Hereafter was no imminent Socialist Paradise, lasting only for life, and promising five pounds of bread instead of one. Theirs was an eternal paradise, perpetual bliss for an endless period, or everlasting torment. And even that didn't succeed. Men were not transformed. Any Christian in the twentieth century is actuated by the same motives as the Roman of 2,000 years ago. He is a good family man."

"Will there be nothing left of us either?"

"Nothing except what doesn't matter, and cannot be predicted."

Chekalin smiled mockingly and wearily.

"Well then, as far as I'm concerned, let's drink to the unpredictable. There'll be nothing left, you say—perhaps not. But if anything is to be permanent in the history of mankind, it will be something of ours, never of yours. Your side encumbers the earth like a multitude of blind worms; there'll be neither fairy tales nor songs left to remind us of you."

"I'll confess freely that I don't care a tinker's damn about your songs. It's immaterial to me whether songs are sung, or monuments erected, or whether they aren't. I realise that every monument has for mankind its fatal attractions, unexpressed and yet entrancing. More, it is true that every man dreams of his own monument. True also that life isn't too agreeable with a monument for company, yet, nevertheless, there's the monument! For the price is too high. To build a monument with one's own blood, only to have it hanging round one's neck, so that at a later day some bored American woman can take a snapshot of it with her kodak, as a record of a Stalinist pyramid, constructed of my own bones—I have no

inclination to join in such little entertainments. What does interest me is the fate of the masses."

"Stop being a demagogue, Solonevich. Who bothers about the masses? The masses! If they get in the way, we'll crack them on the head and forget about them. We're not concerned with the masses, but with leadership. You had hard luck with your last Nicholas and we have had the same hard luck with our Stalin. A complete blockhead is always inclined to run his head against a stone wall."

"Ha!" said I. "At last you've admitted it."

"Why not? We've outlived the German Revolution, the Chinese Revolution—we've plundered our peasants, repelled our workers, destroyed our party machine, and now, God help us, we've the prospect of war to face! None of us would survive that—nor would there be much of Russia left. You've talked of the Third Revolution; have you really any concrete idea of what that would mean?"

"In a general way I think I understand what it would mean."

"Really? The peasant will seize the kolkhoz—various obscure persons will rise to temporary power. Mushroom republics will spring up. And yet you talk of the Third Revolution! What the outcome would be no one can say."

Chekalin, having emptied the brandy bottle, went to his chest for more, nor did I try to prevent him. He uncorked a new bottle, filled our glasses, and we continued drinking and smoking in silence. Here we sat, on one side of the table a conscript and counter-revolutionary, on the other a Chekist and Communist! Outside the storm was howling, inside my head a swarm of ideas was

buzzing. Finally, Chekalin rose and gazed through the window into the dark and stormy night, as though seeking some way out.

Returning and refilling the glasses, he asked: "Tell me, is the story of the Czar bowing down before the people an invention, or did it really happen?"

"No, that's true—it was an old custom."

"That's interesting. It may be, as you say, that our present worthy Government doesn't suspect the direction from which danger threatens. Perhaps it isn't in any way the Social Revolutionaries or Social Democrats who constitute a menace. I remember an incident, a year ago, when I was working in a Concentration Camp in Siberia, not far from Omsk. A rumour spread through the villages that there was a Grand Duchess working in the neighbourhood as a servant. In consequence, all the kolkhozes were deserted—the peasants had run away to try to get a look at the Grand Duchess. But who would run off to have a look at a Socialist?—the Socialists are of no account anyhow. But there's one thing you're quite wrong about. You think that life will improve after all our necks have been broken, that there will be more bread and fewer transport trains. I'm inclined to think the opposite. However, just now I'm serving you with cognac; later perhaps you'll give it to me in some White Guard Concentration Camp. That won't be any jollier than ours; and, in the meanwhile, all our dreams of a better future for mankind will have gone to pot. Some Hitler will be sitting on the world throne in that dream of yours, and will drive mankind back to the Middle Ages, to the Papacy, to the Inquisition. It's true that we're wading in blood up to our bellies, but do you think that will work out any better? You think there's a heaven

above, but perhaps there isn't any heaven above. Perhaps there's only the earth and blood up to one's belly! But if mankind finally realises that there isn't any heaven, and never was any, and that all these millions perished in vain—what then?"

"Admitted, that far too much blood has been shed. Perhaps with no assurance of ultimate success. There are so few of us—so many of you. All kinds of Starodubtsevs keep getting in the way, and yet it's possible to carry Russia to the goal so that the centre of World Revolution may remain!"

"Does Russia mean to you no more than the nucleus of World Revolution?"

"And if it isn't the nucleus, who will have any use for it?"

"Any number of people, including myself."

"You?"

"You've never been outside Russia. You ought to make a journey. You would soon realise that it's Russia and not the question of a nucleus that interests you—that a German or Chinese nucleus wouldn't be worth a penny to you, much less the sacrifice of your life."

Chekalin was taken aback. "Well, perhaps you're right. But I can't see what is to be done about it. Idealism finds its home in the Party alone. The West European proletariat is only an oligarchy. Our fraternal foreign Communists only fill their pockets at our expense. We held out a hand in fellowship to help them—they stretched out their hands for subsidies."

"Why not look at the matter from another point of view? No hand of friendship was ever extended to you by any but a gang of thieves and rascals, who are well enough in evidence as it is, even in the Russian Com-

munist Party. Your idealism means nothing but wholesale murder to support a government at all costs. Has Yakimenko ever had a single idea in his head that was worth a kopek? You know that Stalin is aiming at a world dictatorship, rather than a party dictatorship, which he has long since achieved. You'll admit that most of the Party leaders to-day are no better than scoundrels. What has become of Rakovski, Trotsky, Rykov, Tomski? For the matter of that, from my standpoint, these men weren't so much better, and yet they were at least genuine fanatics with ideas. But would you say that a Litvinov-Finkelstein, a Sulimanov, has any ideas at all, not to mention the underlings?"

Meanwhile, the turnips had all been eaten, and there remained only caviare, sauerkraut, and brandy available. Smiling wryly, Chekalin remarked: "The provision front seems to be breaking down. All we can do is to drink and eat sauerkraut. Well, after all, that's part of the Revolution. In a way, your position as an onlooker is preferable to mine. I've been a part of the Revolution since I was sixteen. I've been wounded three times, one of my brothers was killed by the White Russians under Kolchak, while the other was killed by the Reds on the Wrangel Front. My father, who was a railway man, died of starvation. And once I had a wife! Eighteen years' service—and not a day's decent domestic existence in the whole period, and there are millions like me."

"No, there are not millions like you, not by any means."

"Yes, there are millions, Comrade Solonevich, nor is there any way of escape. And even if there are too many rogues, that's part of the price we pay. But there's one ally we have which you under-estimate—the foreign

governments. They co-operate whether they like it or not, but they do co-operate. Perhaps we shall win through after all, although it's too late as far as I am concerned."

"You think you are making tools of foreign governments? May not they be making a tool of you?"

"Of course they're our tools," replied Chekalin emphatically. "With us everything is unified,—politics, the army, exports, and imports. And no questions in Parliament to bother us. A pretty clean piece of work, what?"

"Maybe, but it's a poor consolation that for this you have turned everything in Russia upside down—a condition the rest of Europe would never tolerate. It may be true, as you say, that Stalin will last until the next European war; he may take advantage of difficulties, even provoke them—but that would plainly mean the destruction of all civilisation in Europe."

Chekalin regarded me with the sly glance of a drunkard. "What in Heaven's name has the civilisation of Europe ever done for the toiling masses? Do you contend that the workmen and the peasants ever received anything worth having from the Czars?"

"Not too much, I'll admit; but, in any event, far more than they have received from Stalin."

"Stalin is only a symbol of transition, you and I are the same. Or, perhaps, as Lenin thought, it's just a case of our living in an epoch of wars and revolutions."

"And that tickles you to death."

"Every man, Comrade Solonevich, would like to live a life of his own. Even I. I'd like to be a family man, with a wife and children; but what can't be can't be. Perhaps

the Socialist State will be built on our bones—at least the HOPE that our descendants will enjoy a better world is worth something.”

Chekalin suddenly grinned at me, as though he had made a discovery, and continued: “That last remark of mine is interesting in a way. I’ve no children, so I can’t have any descendants, but you have a son, and so it may well enough happen that I’m working myself to death for the sake of your descendants.”

“It would be much better, God knows, if you took the trouble to provide yourself with offspring of your own and left me to the care of mine. That would ensure a better life for all of them.”

“As far as I’m concerned, I’ll never have any children. A life like mine takes its own revenges.”

This confession astonished me. The facts are common enough, but are very seldom admitted. Curiously enough, Chekalin’s confession, which should have called forth my sympathy, served rather to strengthen my dislike for all these idealists, enthusiasts, and fanatics. For centuries, they had busied themselves with stubborn and unbending obstinacy in spoiling not only their own but other people’s lives. All these Torquemadas, Savonarolas, Robespierres, and Lenins pander to the innate stupidity of mankind with their sinister powers. There before me was another of these idealists, drenched to his navel in blood, including his own. He was impelled by his nature to continue pressing forward, destroying every life that came in his way, and ruthlessly sacrificing himself and his victims to the religion of organised hate. Was there any benevolence in these men? Was benevolence a human reality or just a golden dream of half-wits? Pitiable as Chekalin might be in his loneliness and life of hopeless

misery, he was appalling in his obstinacy, and in his restless urge to press onwards.

Not in the least suspecting what was passing through my mind, Chekalin continued: "And you regard me as a hangman, even if you don't say so—you think perhaps it's an easy and pleasant thing for me to go on wading up to my navel in blood, that it's a real pleasure to be active in the Concentration Camp! But I must continue as an Activist on behalf of the Party until capitalism is fully liquidated."

The liquor was beginning to take effect, so that Chekalin's speech became blurred and his hands trembled.

"And what's to be the end of it all? A wilderness, perhaps? Even Kaganovitch will not remain. Life was, and is—no more. If we could be born anew, a century hence, and observe the life around us, perhaps after all there would be nothing to see, and it would be better not to have been born again. And still it might have been worth living and having a son like yours, or perhaps a little younger—the devil take it. Let's have another drink, and drink to your descendants. And mine? There'll be none."

Chekalin staggered towards the bed to get some more liquor from the trunk, but this time I was adamant.

"No, Comrade Chekalin, positively, I can't drink any more. I've work to do."

"I've told you already there'll be no more work for you. I'll accept no more transport trains."

"No, I'll have to go."

"Why not stay over night with me, there'll be room."

"That won't do. Somebody might see me leaving your



hut in the morning, and that might start the worst kind of gossip."

"Yes, perhaps you're right. What a devil of a life it is we lead, after all!"

"After all, you have helped to make it a devil of a life."

"Not I, but the times. What am I, after all? Millions are equally responsible. And if it's the devil's own life, after all, there's not so much left of it. You're leaving? I'm sorry."

We shook hands once more and went to the door.

"Forgive me if I said some nasty things about you Socialists."

"The devil! I'm no Socialist, I told you."

"True, I'd forgotten that. It's all the same—Socialist or non-Socialist, to the devil with all of them. Just a moment," Chekalin said, and stepped back into the room, while I remained standing, uncertainly, where I was. In an instant Chekalin reappeared with a little package wrapped in newspaper, and stuffed it into my pocket.

"Caviare," he explained, "for your boy. Now not a word; it's for our descendants, that's to say for your descendant. Mine have gone to the devil already. Wait one second, and I'll give you a light."

"Better not. Somebody might see us."

"True enough. Damn it all, what a lousy life!"

The snowstorm had been raging all this time. The gale closed the door behind me with a bang. I stood for a moment on the threshold, and let the fresh air cool my heated brow. In my gallery of sacrifices to the Communist meat-grinder I was ready to introduce a new figure: Comrade Chekalin—a worn-out and blood-encrusted cog in this incomparable State mechanism.

*Professor Butko*

Despite the snowstorm, the darkness, and the brandy I had consumed, I didn't lose my way for an instant on the return journey. With snow banks and fences behind me, I glimpsed at last the lighted windows of the U.R.CH. Our improvised electric light station functioned all through the night, and of late for the sole benefit of Yura and myself. The peasant huts got no current while the Camp staff slept. I had a passing thought of the advisability of visiting the lighting station and sending the attendants home to sleep. However, I decided that I must look after Yura first.

The door of the U.R.CH. was closed. Professor Butko, the Professor of Reflexology, whom I have already mentioned, opened at my knock. For the last two weeks he had borne a new responsibility—to clean out the latrines! This was a task which, besides other advantages, brought him an extra hundred grammes of bread daily.

The ante-room of the U.R.CH. was unlighted, except for the brightness of the stove. The Professor confronted me, attired only in a torn coat and armed with a poker. I concluded that he had probably been sitting by the stove brooding. His drooping Ukrainian moustache made him look dejected.

"Do you want to do some more work?" he inquired ironically.

"No, I only want to see how Yura is getting on."

"He's sleeping; but he must have knocked his head against something."

Disturbed, I entered the next room and found Yura still asleep. The end of the bunk showed blood stains—apparently my cigarette paper had loosened. Yura had a towel tied around his head, while his feet were covered

with a cloak, evidently thrown over him by Professor Butko. Meanwhile, the Professor, instead of going to sleep himself, had been keeping up the fire in the stove because it was too cold to go to sleep without his cloak, and he had had nothing else to throw over Yura. I felt considerably ashamed of myself.

Until recently Professor Butko, according to his own account, had been a teacher in a provincial high school. At the time of Ukrainisation and the 'creation of the new cultural Cadres', he was made a professor, a step which in the Soviet Union means nothing in particular and imposes no special duties. In the Pedagogical Institute of the City of Kamenez-Pudolsk he taught the imperfectly defined subject known as reflexology. Under this heading were included, according to occasion, pedagogy, occupational psychology, such remnants of psychology as were still considered permissible, and various other odds and ends. Professor Butko accepted this somewhat dubious professorship in good faith, without attempting to assess the actual facts and scope of Soviet culture.

After the political necessities of Ukrainisation had passed, and the meretricious titles of culture, created for the purpose, had been thrown into the junk heap, the unfortunate Professor Butko, in company with divers colleagues, received a sentence of five years in a Concentration Camp, under the particularly exasperating espionage paragraphs, specifically Paragraph 58, Sub-Division 6.

His family was banished to some place in Siberia—not to a Concentration Camp, but solitarily, with no allowance for their support. Butko was supposed to rejoin them there after the termination of his sentence, and

probably to remain in Siberia for the rest of his life, as he never expected to be permitted to return to the Ukraine. This prospect of perpetual banishment depressed Butko more than his five-year sentence.

Professor Butko, like many of the minor Separatists, was firmly convinced that the Ukraine had been devastated, and that he had been banished to the Concentration Camp not by the Bolsheviks but by the Great Russians. We had frequently discussed the matter, and I had striven to assure him that I was in no sense a Great Russian, but merely a hundred per cent White Russian, although I was glad to have learned the Russian language instead of the White Russian dialect, and that I was pleased that local patriotism had never threatened the paramount interests of Russia as a whole.

Whatever my shortcomings, I could never discover utility in provincialism which tended to exert a disintegrating effect. I was not always courteous in expressing my views, which was a pity, since Butko was only a disciple of Pushkin, and anything but a fool. He was just a provincial romantic. In the conscript world of the U.R.C.H. the strain of living together was too great to permit of one's temper being kept under control. Butko had felt offended by my remarks, and rightly so. I had been sadly in the wrong, and had neglected to apologise. Despite this, Butko was sitting sleepless because he had lent his cloak to protect a Great Russian youngster.

"It's too bad that you should have to do this, Comrade Butko. Just take your cloak, and I'll run over to my tent and fetch a blanket."

"Don't bother—it will soon be dawn. I'll sit by the stove and keep warm. Won't you keep me company?"

I felt anything but sleepy, owing to the excitement

provoked by Chekalin's brandy and conversation, but I was in an extremely irritable state, as the past weeks of constant strain were telling on me. As we sat down by the stove, I looked for my supply of makhorka in vain. That was a trifle annoying. I had probably left it at Chekalin's. It seemed possible, however, that it had been wrapped up in the caviare package, so I drew this out. The newspaper was torn in one or two places, and the caviare was coming out through the tears. Underneath the caviare I found an unsuspected gift of Chekalin's—three boxes of Troika cigarettes, a brand only to be had in the best shops, which cost seven and a half roubles for a box of twenty. I offered Professor Butko one of these. He looked at me with a queer expression, and then asked softly:

"Where in the world did you manage to get so much liquor, Ivan Lukianovich?"

"Is it so noticeable then?"

"Not too obvious, perhaps, except for the odour of some excellent cognac."

"Yes, it was cognac."

Butko sighed. "And all because you're a Great Russian Chauvinist. Like, after all, calls to like, and you people from Moscow all have imperialism in your blood, whether you call yourselves Bolshevists, Mensheviks, or Monarchists."

"How often have I told you that I haven't a single drop of Great Russian blood in my veins?"

"Perhaps you have done something to quench your imperialism, which isn't, after all, so hard to do."

"You remember the old historian who said that the Slavs prefer to live separately. That's in our blood, if you like, but can you imagine a German going to war for the

sake of a separatist Bavarian State? Although there's a greater difference in the dialects than in Russia."

"What good has it done for Prussia to conquer the rest of Germany?"

"We certainly have derived no benefit from it, unless it is the risk of the Ukraine being swallowed up, just as other Slavonic peoples were absorbed in earlier days."

"As things go, it might be better if the Germans did swallow us. Under their control we should at least escape starvation and the Concentration Camp. For us Ukrainians you Great Russians are worse masters than Tartars."

"Did you Ukrainians starve under the Czars?"

"We didn't exactly starve, but our national culture was continually trampled on. It's in the Great Russian blood," repeated Butko with Ukrainian obstinacy. "I'm not thinking of you personally, you're a bit of a renegade."

I remembered his cloak and controlled myself. "Let's drop the subject, anyhow," I said. "I've got relatives among the White Russian peasants. During the long period that I lived in White Russia, it never occurred to me that my family were not White Russians. I spent six years in the Ukraine, and many times I had to translate newspapers and Government documents from Ukrainian into Russian, because the Ukrainian peasants could understand Russian more easily."

"Aren't you exaggerating, Ivan Lukianovich?"

"Not at all, even Commissar Skrypnik was finally compelled to free the Ukrainian dialect from various Galatian terms, which nobody in the Ukraine, except a few specialists, could understand."

"Do you think we could have developed under Mos-

cow rule, if we had continued using the Ukrainian language?"

"That's beside the point. White Russian and Ukrainian separatism created positions for a host of people who were unfitted for them, and the peasant, whether he be White Russian or Ukrainian, needs these useless officials no more than a coach requires a fifth wheel. The peasant cares little enough for the Separatists. Nobody joined Petlura in the name of separatism."

"A lot of people would follow him nowadays."

"If they did, it would be in opposition to the Bolsheviks, not the Great Russians."

"They would oppose Moscow."

"They would oppose the Moscow of to-day, yes, but not the Great Russian Moscow, or its speech. The Ukrainian peasant doesn't want to learn Ukrainian; he feels that the Bolsheviks are trying to steal the Russian language from him, to keep him a stupid peasant."

"The people haven't yet realised the truth."

And so the argument went on. Butko had a single-track mind. He was one of those who are willing to risk their own and other people's lives for a cause, but he remained blinded by prejudice to all understanding. He loved his country, and was grieved at its present fate. I was sorry for Butko, but hardly knew how to console him.

After a long silence Butko exclaimed: "At home the steppes will now be coming into bloom," and he stared at the glowing coals.

It was the beginning of March and the steppes in the Ukraine would actually be bursting into bloom, while here nothing was to be seen but the eternal snow. However, we could still do with an hour's sleep.

"That's how things are, Ivan Lukianovich," said Butko; "in spite of all our arguments, we shall soon lie in the grave side by side. Not really in separate graves, but just in a common pit."



## THE LIQUIDATION

*The Awakening*

I reached my tent and climbed into my bunk, hoping for a little sleep before the orderly should come and say: "Comrade Solonevich, you are wanted at U.R.CH!"

But sleep would not come to my tired brain. I kept recalling fragments of my conversation with Chekalin. I was worried by his discreet warnings about Yakimenko's knowledge of what we were doing. Then, half dozing, I would see the figure of Yura as a chubby little youngster, and hear him saying:

"Daddy, Daddy, put on your spectacles, or you'll catch cold."

When I awoke, bright sunshine was pouring into the tent. Near the stove lay the night watchman, covered with rags and sound asleep. No one else was in the tent. I felt I had slept enough, and looked at my watch, but it had stopped. It flashed upon me that something had happened. Why did they not call me? Why was I alone in the tent? What was Yura doing? I jumped out of bed and rushed to the U.R.CH. To my astonishment, I found empty rooms. No tables, no chairs, no typewriters, no dossiers—odd pieces of timber and scraps of paper. Even the glass had been removed from the windows. The wind was whirling scraps of paper from one corner to another. I picked up one of them—it was the card of a certain

Sidorov or Petrov. There were signatures and seals certifying that during seven years' confinement this Sidorov or Petrov had 'earned' 600 days' reduction of sentence. "So they've lost this paper," I thought, "which means he has lost two years of his life." I put the paper in my pocket and returned to the tent, where I awakened the watchman.

"Where is Yura?"

"He went for a walk with your brother."

"Where is the U.R.CH?"

"U.R.CH. has been evacuated. Everybody has gone."

"And Yakimenko?"

"I tell you everybody's gone. They took all the papers and left."

It was impossible to obtain any more information from the fellow. For the present, however, this was enough. It seemed that Chekalin had kept his word and refused to receive any more transports. So Yakimenko collected all his papers, and his Activists weighed anchor and sailed for Medgora. What could have become of Starodubtsev? However, he could go to the devil now, so far as I was concerned.

I went out into the yard, feeling like a 'monarch for an hour', in fact, perhaps for several hours.

I strolled to the river bank. On the right, three-quarters of a mile away, on a hill, stood the little village church. Its light blue onion-shaped dome shone brightly in the sun. Adjoining was the village cemetery with all its little mounds of 'eternal rest'. The squat pine-trees had snowy hats pulled over their twigs. There, too, was the empty bell tower, whose bells had long since been removed and melted down to help 'industrialisation'. Through the broken window of the little church

sparrows were flying in and out. At the bottom of the hill ran the swiftly flowing river, murmuring as it went. The whole scene, lighted by the clear Northern winter sky, would have made an excellent subject for one of Levitan's paintings. In the distance were the deep blue tints of the Karelian virgin forests.

I sat on the snow-covered hillside, by the river's bank, and lit a cigarette. Although U.R.Ch. with its terrors and futility, Yakimenko, and B.A.M. were no more, my reflections were far from happy.

I remembered one night when we were alone in U.R.Ch., Boris came to help us type the lists for transports and to delete the 'dead souls'. Yura, rubbing his shrunken fingers, began to dream aloud: how good it would be to escape from the Camp and go to one of the South Sea islands, where there would be no more wars, G.P.U., prisoners, étapes, classes, transport, trains, and systematic brutality. Boris looked up from his card index and said grimly:

"You want to rest too soon, Yura. We shall have to fight yet, and fight furiously!"

Someone leaned roughly against me from behind and a pair of arms clasped me tightly round the chest. 'Danger' flashed through my brain like lightning, and, like the same lightning, the instinct of self-defence was aroused. Long years of training had taught me not to resist until my chance came. We rolled down the hill together until we landed on a snow-drift. My spectacles were covered with snow, so that I could not see my assailant, but instinctively I slipped his leg under my knee (forming the terrible 'key'), and was just beginning to turn over, which would have broken it like a pipe stem, when I heard Boris's loud laugh from the hill-top and Yura's husky voice near me.

I was extremely angry. Another moment and Yura might have been seriously injured. In ordinary times scuffling had been a favourite pastime in our mirth-loving family. From his childhood Yura had known no greater delight than to wrestle with his own father, and after half an hour of wriggling to jump on my stomach and demand: "Do you surrender?"

But Yura looked up so radiantly, he was completely covered with snow, and felt so merry, after all these U.R.CH. nights, B.A.M. lists, transports, etc., at having the chance to roll about in the snow, that I could only sigh. During so many months, this was his first sign of high spirits—why should I spoil it?

We wiped our spectacles, brushed the snow from our collars, and began to climb up. Boris stretched his arm, and told Yura in tones of gentle reproach:

"You ought not to do such things, Yurchik. It's a pity I could not stop you in time."

"What's wrong now? Do you think Dad would have had a heart attack?"

"Nothing could happen to Ivan's heart, but your bones might easily have been broken, as he could not be expected to know who was attacking him. Don't forget we are in Camp, not in Saltykovka."

Yura seemed a little put out, but the sun shone so brightly that it was not worth while to say more about the incident.

We sat down in the snow, and I told them of my conversation with Chekalin, which was no longer of much importance. Boris and Yura told me, in turn, that I had slept more than twenty-four hours.

The previous morning Chekalin had, with his doctor, arrived at the loading platform, examined twenty-five or

thirty prisoners, written a minute that W.B.C. was giving him people who had been twice rejected on account of bad health, then took his train and went away, leaving Yakimenko speechless with astonishment.

Yakimenko, taking with him his 'specialists', the U.R.Ch. Activists, the personal dossiers, typewriters, etc., had departed for Medgora. Of Yura and myself there had been no mention. Whether it was because we had never been officially appointed to U.R.Ch. or because Yakimenko had no further need of our services, we did not know. The remnant of Podporozhie Division would apparently be transferred to the neighbouring Svir Camp. For the moment we could not make up our minds whether it would be better to remain in Svir Camp, or to try to go to the North, to W.B.C., where the rest of the administrative staff of Podporozhie would be transferred.

Meanwhile, the sun was shining brightly; we felt easier in our minds and almost optimistic. Chekalin's caviare was still in my pocket, and we abandoned ourselves to the mood of the moment.

### *Liquidation Commission*

For several days all three of us amused ourselves in the empty Camp. The High Command allotted us a certain amount of food, while we helped ourselves to firewood from the power station. Yura spent part of his time setting snares for crows, to improve our bill of fare. Boris busied himself with his ambulances, his hospital, and his 'Weak Strength' duties.

After a few days it became known that Podporozhie would be transferred to the Svir Camp, and that a Liquidation Commission would replace the former Podporozhie staff, with the recent Division Commander,

Comrade Wiedemann, at its head. Wiedemann was a dour and corpulent fellow, with an immense belly, and rolls of fat about his neck, in spite of his being only thirty-odd years of age. I could tell at a glance that here was no second Chekalin, and that we should have to be on our guard all the time.

Nadejda Constantinovna, the wife of an imprisoned agronomist, was appointed business manager of the Liquidation Commission. Her husband had once been a Communist, and representative of the People's Commissar for Agriculture.

Yura and I obtained work as typists with the Liquidation Commission. We had to work no longer than ten hours a day, and there were also occasional holidays. No one was expected to overwork himself.

I was able to sit restfully at my typewriter, and quietly type the letters and instructions of the members of the Liquidation Commission of the W.B.C., as well as the interminable inventories of the Receiving Commission of the Svir Camp. These last would read something like this: "Barrack 47—constructed of lumber— $50 \times 7\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{2}{10}$  metres—equipped with two stoves—floor of planed boards, manufactured doors, windows with frames and glass, etc."

As a matter of fact, Barrack 47, with its complete equipment of doors, windows, etc., had long since been burned up as firewood, during the days when the W.B.C. was trying to transfer its "dead" men to the B.A.M. Now the W.B.C. was transferring its vanished barracks to the Svir Camp. The managers of the Svir Camp tolerated these absurdities without raising an eyebrow. I naturally said nothing, as it was no affair of mine.

After the Svir Camp had, in this fashion, taken over

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about half the alleged Podporozhie Division, a brigadier came over from Svir, and displayed unusual intelligence. He went over to Pogra, and discovered that the barracks which the Svir Camp Commission had taken over did not exist. Thereupon the two institutions in question exchanged correspondence full of unconscious humour.

W.B.C. maintained that they had owned certain barracks which had been duly included in the inventory, and subsequently transferred the inventory to the Svir Camp, which had accepted the same. The Svir Camp people contended that they had simply accepted an inventory without checking it; which did not imply that they were willing to testify to its accuracy.

W.B.C. thereupon casually suggested that they had passed on whatever they had to Svir, and all Svir had to do was, in due course, to pass it on to someone else. The Svir people naturally inquired to whom they were supposed to pass it. To which the W.B.C. responded: "That's your affair. We've passed the buck."

The argument might have gone on for ever. The parties to the dispute submitted their respective grievances to the G.U.L.A.G., after sending representatives to Moscow for the purpose, at considerable expense.

Meanwhile, Yura and I enjoyed our new-found leisure to the full, and took a special delight in the advance of spring. After the liquidation of the Camp Post Office, packages actually began to reach us through the regular Soviet mails. This system was still too new for pilfering to have made much headway; consequently a reasonable proportion of what was sent us actually arrived.

At this juncture orders arrived from Moscow to pack up everything in sight and leave. Another endless argument began between W.B.C. and Svir, over the



question of whether the tens of thousands of axes, saws, tools, sleighs, etc., could really be found under the winter snow, or whether the inventory, which testified to their existence, was as unreliable in this respect as it had been in the matter of the barracks. Of the five traction engines entered in the inventory, one good one and two in ruins were discovered, but the remaining two had disappeared. After all, traction engines were not like needles in a haystack, and yet there was no trace of them. Thereupon the argument between W.B.C. and Svir waxed fast and furious.

The dredger, which had gone over a precipice, had been listed as a piece of junk, weighing some three hundred tons. The electric plant had also been transferred, and Podporozhie had been in complete darkness ever since. Of course, neither kerosene nor candles were available, and no night work was possible in consequence. As our tent had also been 'liquidated', we moved into an empty Karelian hut, and lived there in peace. We could no longer get firewood from the power station, but we managed to obtain it from the Liquidation Commission. Representatives of both Camps kept travelling to Moscow to lodge complaints against each other. One day a telegram arrived from Moscow, ordering the power station to resume operation. Meanwhile, however, the Svir people had been astute enough to dispatch the generator elsewhere, and without it nothing could be done. A series of telegrams between Moscow and the Camp ensued, without, of course, any result. In other words, the whole situation had arrived at the usual Bolshevik point of endless mutual recriminations.

*The Fate of the 'Human Inventory'*

When it came to handing over the 'human inventory' of Podporozhie to Svir, that latter raised the natural objection that in view of previous experience, such a list was certain to be completely unreliable. Under these circumstances, Svir felt no inclination to take over the W.B.C. In the meantime, W.B.C. was naturally trying to transfer to Svir such people only as were unfit for work, especially since that was about all there was left to dispose of! Svir, naturally indignant, continued to send telegrams and representatives to Moscow, and meanwhile placed the men accepted under guard.

Clashes between the W.B.C. people and the guard frequently occurred. Owing to the perpetual strife, the ravines filled with dead beasts remained unguarded, which fact served to save a certain number of the remaining W.B.C. prisoners from starvation.

While this continuous quarrel between the W.B.C. and Svir was flourishing, often to the complete neglect of necessary duties on both sides, it was discovered one day, about eleven o'clock in the evening, after the customary interminable argument, that the provision of food for the twenty thousand people still remaining in Camp had been completely forgotten. A frantic series of telegrams and other urgent messages ensued, and then, after a couple of days, provisions arrived from Petrosavodsk. Meanwhile, the unfortunate prisoners saved themselves from starvation by roasting horse-flesh on their fires, without any attempt at concealment.

In order to put an end to this lamentable confusion, a representative of the G.U.L.A.G. was eventually dispatched from Moscow, and, at the same time, Yaki-

menko came over in person from Medgora, to assist the none too intelligent Wiedemann.

Boris, who had all this time been going about with clenched teeth and fists, dropped in to see Yakimenko 'for old acquaintance' sake, to point out that it really was not decent, even under existing conditions, to leave the prisoners completely without nourishment. Yakimenko, in his turn, proved extremely amiable, and stated that there should be no difficulty in getting provisions during the liquidation, and that supplies of food from the G.U.L.A.G. had already been arranged for. It was quite true that orders to this effect had been issued; but they produced no immediate result. Any food that might have arrived was immediately seized and disposed of, for their own benefit, by the various officials involved in this muddle.

### *Minutes of the Meetings*

The Camp starved, while the Liquidation Commission, with Bolshevistic tenacity, continued to argue and argue. Nadejda Constantinovna duly recorded the minutes of the sessions. She was an excellent shorthand writer and typist, and a conscientious and accurate woman. In consequence, the speeches of Comrade Wiedemann, when recorded on the typewriter, proved truly astounding. Nadejda Constantinovna used to take them, with suppressed excitement, into Wiedemann's room for signature; after which one would hear a deep bass voice:

"What the devil have you written down here? I didn't say anything of the sort. The devil only knows what this means, yet you call yourself a shorthand writer. You'll have to correct this immediately, so as to record exactly what I said."

Thereupon it would be corrected and brought to me for transcription. After a while I got tired of the continual confusion, and made Nadejda Constantinovna an offer: "Suppose you let me take charge of the meetings for a time, while you do the typing."

"But you can't write shorthand."

"That doesn't matter. I'll guarantee complete success—money refunded if not satisfactory!"

Thereupon Nadejda Constantinovna pleaded illness, while I modestly entered Wiedemann's office, and said:

"Comrade Nadejda Constantinovna asked me to take her place, with your permission, while she is ill."

"Are you a capable shorthand-writer?"

"Yes, I have an exclusive system of my own."

"Well, then let's try it."

The next morning my typed transcription was ready for inspection. I had used my own judgment, and had included in Comrade Wiedemann's alleged remarks all the customary Soviet slogans which I thought belonged there, irrespective of whether he had uttered them, and, at the same time, deleted anything he had actually said which I felt was better omitted. Nadejda Constantinovna took these minutes of my concoction to Wiedemann with great misgiving, but immediately Wiedemann's bass voice resounded like a trumpet:

"That's what I call a report! Whereas, you, Comrade Nadejda Constantinovna, used to make me say things that were completely incomprehensible."

Naturally I included, at times, in my own productions, references which seemed to me necessary, whether the discussion had actually taken place or not. When the representatives of Svir raised any question on the matter, Wiedemann would thunder out in reply:



THE AUTHOR'S BROTHER, DR. BORIS SOLONEVICH

"The deuce take it. That's what was said, and that's what took place, and you yourselves took part in it. This is a word-for-word transcription, and if you are going to try to sabotage our proceedings by denying it——!"

Wiedemann was, after all, a man of action, so that finally the Syir people would sign my transcripts, despite reluctant sighs, which were often audible to me in the next room.

In consequence of all this, Wiedemann began to take some notice of me. In particular, when he came into our room, he would lay his hand in proprietary fashion on Nadejda Constantinovna's shoulder, as if to intimate that I had better not lust after other people's possessions. This, however, was quite unnecessary, as no such idea had ever occurred to me. But I began, at this time, once more to regret that the devil had again brought us into contact with the high direction of the Camp.

### *The Convalescent Camp*

However, the connection referred to above continued under the devil's auspices. Meanwhile, Boris lived sometimes in Pogra and sometimes with us, according to circumstance. We were quite comfortably situated, all things considered, and while we were deprived of illumination, we had plenty of wood for our stove, which answered tolerably well. In fact, there was quite an atmosphere of home about our little establishment. One day Boris arrived full of an idea that had occurred to him.

"All kinds of deviltries are going on at Pogra. The invalids of the 'Weak Strength' are receiving no care at all, and I'm inclined to believe that, under present circumstances, no improvement is to be hoped for. It seems to

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me that the thing to do is to organise Pogra into a kind of Convalescent Camp, where all the invalids of the northerly Camps, 'Weak Strength' people, and so on, may be collected, and a certain amount of light work undertaken, the whole show being meanwhile under the protection of G.U.L.A.G. If the idea is put to them in the right way, I shouldn't be surprised to find G.U.L.A.G. willing to advance some liquid capital to further the project. In any case, unless something of this kind is done, W.B.C. and Svir will simply go on arguing to the end of time, that is until all our people are dead. What do you think?"

I did not feel enthusiastic. "Here we've escaped alive from the B.A.M. adventure, the Lord be thanked, and now you want to let us in for a new khaltura!"

"This is no khaltura," said Boris earnestly.

"If it's not, it's something worse. In four months' time we must attempt to make our escape. This is not the moment for us to be tied by the leg."

"You talk like that just because you have never worked in 'Weak Strength' or in the hospital. Otherwise, you'd take an altogether different view."

I felt rebuked. I had previously done what I thought right to help others in the B.A.M. affair, and now I could hardly deny him the opportunity of trying to do something for his unfortunate patients. He went on:

"You must understand that the present position is much more serious than the B.A.M. matter was."

It was really a much more serious matter, as it involved the question of life and death for a great multitude of prisoners. In former years the Commission of Doctors and Camp Heads had officiated in such matters, and had, among other things, contrived frequently to release the

Intelligentsia, when no longer capable of hard work, from the Concentration Camps. Under a Commission of this kind, Boris himself had been released from the Solovetsky Islands, when he had nearly lost his sight. However, the activities of these Commissions were objectionable to the G.P.U., and they were abolished. In consequence, the unfortunate invalids were left to the tender mercies of the system previously described, under which, with decreasing rations and declining strength, they simply ended by starving to death. In the Podporozhie Division, there were four thousand five hundred men sick and unable to work, besides some seven thousand on 'Weak Strength'. Admittedly, this was a far more serious situation than that involved in the B.A.M. Project.

"Do you really believe," I asked Boris, "that the G.U.L.A.G. will be willing to provide sufficient food for your invalids?"

"Well, now they get four hundred grammes of bread a day, and do no work whatever. In all the Northern Camps there must be forty or fifty thousand invalids in the same plight. It would certainly be preferable to organise some kind of light work for these people, and in return give them six hundred grammes of bread for their labour rather than four hundred now completely wasted. If the scheme is properly worked out, and presented to the G.U.L.A.G. in the right way, I'm inclined to think that extra rations would be allowed."

"It seems to me," Yura broke in, "that there's really nothing to argue about. Boris is absolutely right. And you, Dad, are just simply a 'fraid cat'. As for the kind of work, that's not so difficult to suggest. This is a district where there's any amount of birch, and it would



be easy to start a factory for making little birch chests, cigarette boxes, and similar articles. Nor do I see where there's any danger to us in the project."

"Children, children," I sighed. "You must admit that I've had sufficient experience with Soviet projects. This is bound to involve us in some kind of trouble, even if we can't see yet what it will be. As soon as a new adventure starts, there will be an influx of Activists, careerists, and all sorts of other devils of one kind or another, and before you know it, we shall be in the soup."

"Never mind," said Yura, "if we get into a mess, we'll get out of it again . . . it won't be the first time. Meanwhile, we must do what we can, considering the joys of this paradise!"

Yura continued to expound his favourite ideas.

"Ivan," continued Boris thoughtfully, "leaving everything else out of consideration, we still have our moral responsibilities."

I realised that my opposition was, under the circumstances, futile, and I sought to postpone the issue: "We'll have to make some tentative experiments, at first, to discover how to approach the G.U.L.A.G. in the best way."

"Ivan, we've no time for that. From fifteen to fifty men are dying every day from hunger in Pogra."

We all proved to be true prophets. We made trouble for ourselves, just as I had predicted, with the result that Boris was separated from us. Boris's invalids were actually saved, although nothing came of the Convalescent Camp project. And Yura was right in the surmise that we should eventually get out of the scrape.

*A Woman named Katz*

The project for the organisation of a Convalescent Camp was drawn up in great detail, no aspect of the question being overlooked. The proposal was phrased in strict Marxian terminology; care was taken to suppress the slightest suggestion of humanitarian intent, which might have aroused suspicion that the whole project was merely an attempt to extract a larger quantity of provisions from the higher command. It had to be remembered that the 'Power' was always most niggardly in issuing provisions. The project dwelt primarily upon the necessity for a planned economy, which was to take the fullest advantage of the labour supply in accordance with the industrialisation of labour in our Socialistic country. The various articles to be made were carefully enumerated, and the probable gain seductively expressed in export gold roubles, which last touch was most likely to appeal to G.U.L.A.G. Finally, the necessity for haste because of the possible wastage of existing labour power under present circumstances, was courteously but strongly urged.

Boris took the opportunity to come into our office and type this secretly at night, as it would have been fatal to bring it to Wiedemann's notice prematurely. When the manuscript was finished, the original was handed to the local representative of G.U.L.A.G., a woman named Katz. Copies went to Wiedemann, as representative of W.B.C., to the representative of the Svir Camp, and to Yakimenko as an old acquaintance. Comrade Katz put Boris's project down on the agenda for the next meeting of the Liquidation Commission.

This meeting was to take place, as usual, in Wiedemann's office, in which there duly appeared Yakimenko,

Comrade Petrov of the Third Division, the representative of the Svir Camp, Dr. Shukvetz, Boris, Comrade Katz, and Wiedemann. Comrade Katz declared the meeting open, dumped an enormous brief-case, almost the size of a trunk, on the table in front of her, and then for some reason laid a heavy Colt on top of it. She did this in the manner of a demonstration, as if wishing to emphasise that she was there not simply as a woman or a Chekist but as a public character.

The mere sight of her sent cold shivers down my spine. There she sat—this female of uncertain age, anything between forty-five and sixty, as ugly as sin. She reminded me, more than anything else, of a withered bird of prey, as she swept the assembly with a piercing and suspicious glance, and twisted her vulpine head on her scraggy neck. While she fidgeted with an empty cigarette holder in her mouth with her left hand, her right played with the revolver on her brief-case. Wiedemann eyed the Colt with considerable apprehension. My anticipation of the bliss of seeing the weapon discharge itself upon either of them was interrupted by the harsh tones of the lady presiding.

"The proposition of Dr. What's-his-name is first on the agenda. Very well, let's consider it shortly and to the point, but without reading aloud. This is not a university."

Her words sounded unpleasant enough, and Yaki-menko raised his eyebrows as though Comrade Katz's opening did not displease him. It struck me that it might have been better for Boris to have consulted Comrade Katz in advance, before submitting his idea, which might, however, have necessitated the advisability of postponement. This type of aggressive, unsexed female

is always likely to create some unforeseen disturbance. As a member of the 'old guard' of Bolshevism, she was likely to harbour not only the deepest contempt for us conscripts, but also to look down on the Chekists present as *parvenus*, who had the impudence to sprinkle themselves with eau de Cologne and go their own way, without considering the revolutionary feelings of a woman like herself. Perhaps she divined their hostility, and hence the pose of the empty cigarette holder, the Colt, and the attitude of a wild animal trainer.

Boris rose to his feet and delivered an admirable summary of his proposals from the Soviet standpoint, contrasting the present waste with the future productivity, quoting examples from previous Moscow experiments, and stressing the medical advantages of the project. The only fault that could be found with his exposition was that it was a trifle long and couched in too literary terms. By the time the speech was finished Wiedemann had probably forgotten all about the opening remarks. Comrade Katz asked impatiently: "Well, have you finished?"

"Yes."

"Well then."

Dr. Shukvetz rose nervously and inquired: "Is it permitted?"

"Do you want to say anything? Then go ahead."

"Whether or not there is anything I should like to say is scarcely to the point. In so far as this matter is to be dealt with here, the Medical Division is . . ."

"Be as brief as possible and come to the point!"

Dr. Shukvetz continued: "Very well, to come to the point—I suggest you bear in mind that 90 per cent of our invalids have long lost their health and capacity to work. The Camp is therefore morally bound . . ."

"That is enough. Sit down. That's all moonshine."

Dr. Shukvetz was, however, not satisfied: "My honoured colleague . . ."

"There are no colleagues present, much less any honoured ones. I tell you to sit down." Shukvetz, flustered, sat down. Comrade Katz turned her piercing glance on Boris, and remarked: "A fine idea! What business of yours is all this? Your business is to look after the patients in your charge, and not to bother yourself with what does not concern you."

Yakimenko closed his eyes contemptuously. Boris shrugged his shoulders and replied: "Every Soviet citizen is concerned with anything involving the industrialisation of the country. Moreover, if you thought that all this was no business of mine, why did you place my proposal on the agenda?"

"I instructed Dr. Solonevich——" began Wiedemann.

Comrade Katz turned on him sharply: "Nobody asked you any questions about what instructions you gave or for what purpose."

Wiedemann flushed darkly and desisted. Boris remained silent, toying with a wooden paper-weight, which broke in his hands with a snap. He continued, mechanically, to reduce the pieces he held to splinters. All present watched this exhibition of strength, in spite of themselves, and Comrade Katz actually ceased playing with the revolver. Wiedemann took advantage of this interlude, and pushed the revolver under the brief-case. With the fury of an enraged tigress, Comrade Katz reached for the Colt and returned it to its place, while Comrade Petrov, of the Third Division, looked on as distrustfully as the rest.

"Comrade Katz, is your revolver uncocked?"

"I knew how to handle weapons before you were as tall as this table."

"Since that time," observed Yakimenko humorously, "you may have forgotten how to handle them, and since that time Comrade Petrov has grown tall enough to reach the ceiling."

"Spare us your jokes, Comrade Yakimenko. As for you, Doctor," turning to Boris, "I still want to know what business all this is of yours—not because you are a doctor, but because you are definitely a counter-revolutionary. I don't believe you have any sympathy with the socialisation of industry, and you can't deceive me with all your talk about funds and reserves. As an old Party member, I have seen plenty of the likes of you, and I can only conclude that your project is a cloak for some anti-Party movement, if not a counter-revolutionary conspiracy."

It seemed as if Boris had put his foot in it right at the start. Yakimenko, at least, had been much more astute.

"As for the question of counter-revolutionary activities, that does not interest me in the least," said Boris.

"What do you mean, that it doesn't interest you?"

"Simply that it does not interest me in any way."

Comrade Katz was plainly baffled by such a speech. "I assume the G.P.U. did not send you here for nothing."

"And you can tell that to the G.U.L.A.G.," said Boris with an air of indifference.

"I know, without your telling me, what to report. The matter is simple enough," turning to Yakimenko. "All the doctor wants is to get more bread for all these bandits, thieves, and kulaks. However, we don't find bread lying about in the streets. As for people like you," turning to Boris again, "that is what this Colt is for!"

Boris rose and gathered up his papers in silence.

"What does that mean?"

"I am going back to Pogra."

"With whose permission? You forget you are in a Concentration Camp!"

"Whether in Camp or not, if a man is called to a meeting and his proposals are on the agenda, he should be listened to and not insulted."

"I order you to remain," screamed Comrade Katz, and grasped her revolver.

"Only my chief, Comrade Wiedemann, has authority to give me orders. You have no right to order me about."

"Listen, Dr. Solonevich . . ." began Yakimenko.

Comrade Katz raved at him: "Who told you to interfere? Who is in charge of this meeting, you or I?"

"Stay here a little while, Dr. Solonevich," continued Yakimenko in low but peremptory tones, not, however, addressed to Boris. "I rather think, Comrade Katz, that it is not permissible to conduct a meeting in this fashion."

"I know well enough what is permissible and what is not. My associations with our leaders, Comrade Yakimenko, go back to a time when you would not even dream of belonging to the Party."

The Chief of the Third Division pushed back his chair noisily and rose: "Your associations, Comrade Katz, are your personal affair and do not concern us. When people are summoned here to discuss a matter, it is not decent to shut them up."

"Are you taking it on yourself to instruct an old Bolshevik like me? Is this a committee meeting or a barrack yard?"

The millstones in Wiedemann's brain had finally ground out the conviction that from a military standpoint

he was much more important than Comrade Katz, who had treated him like a schoolboy in his own domain, and that the old Bolshevik female had now succeeded in uniting everyone against her, whereupon he assailed her: "The devil with all this, Comrade Katz. You are behaving like a wild animal just unchained!" Comrade Katz was speechless with rage.

"Ivan Lukianovich," said Yakimenko in amiable tones, at the same time turning to Boris, "will you be good enough to note in the minutes of the meeting my protest against the conduct of Comrade Katz."

"You can say that at a Party meeting, but not here," raged Comrade Katz.

Yakimenko replied sternly and with dignity: "I deplore the fact that you have seen fit to discuss, at this non-Party meeting, your intimate relations with the leaders of the Party."

That settled it. Comrade Katz glowered at the meeting malevolently, but with less self-confidence.

The Chief of the Svir Camp glanced at her with a poisonous smile and remarked: "I take the liberty of adding my protest to that of Comrade Yakimenko."

"I declare the meeting adjourned," announced Comrade Katz, as she rose from her seat.

"Excuse me," said the second representative of Svir Camp, "we can't postpone discussing Camp business because you have an attack of nerves."

"Very good," hissed Comrade Katz, "we will discuss matters with you elsewhere."

"Wherever you like," interjected Yakimenko. "Meanwhile, I move that we accept the proposal of Dr. Solonevich in principle, and submit the matter, with the comments of all of our colleagues here, to the G.U.L.A.G. I



venture to assume that these remarks meet with general approval."

Wiedemann nodded: "Right. The matter should go to the G.U.L.A.G. as soon as possible."

Comrade Katz, on the verge of hysterics, raged at him: "I have not reopened the meeting, Comrade Yakimenko, and I order you to be silent." Her left hand continued to play with her cigarette holder, and her right with her revolver. Yakimenko reached across the table, seized the revolver, and handed it to Petrov:

"Comrade Chief of the Third Division, be good enough to return this weapon to Comrade Katz when she has learned how such weapons are handled."

For a moment Comrade Katz choked with rage, then she left the room in haste.

"Let us agree," continued Yakimenko as though nothing had happened, "to accept Dr. Solonevich's proposal in principle. Now for the next item on the agenda."

The meeting now proceeded smoothly. In fact, the Svir people even accepted delivery as in good condition, without any bickering, of the little railway bridge in Pogra that had been blown up long since.

### *Intrigue*

When the meeting was over and everyone had gone, Yakimenko sat down opposite me with a smile while I typed the minutes: "There's a girl for you!" he remarked. I raised my eyes, and noted the mockery and the gleam of triumph in his. "Have you ever seen a light o' love equal to her?"

"I doubt whether Comrade Katz has ever achieved much success in that direction."

Yakimenko looked at me with curiosity, still smiling: "Tell me frankly, Comrade Solonevich, just what is the 'nigger in the wood pile'?"

"What are you driving at?"

"I am talking about your convalescent scheme."

"Pardon me, I still don't understand your question."

"On the contrary, you understand me perfectly. You are certainly not suggesting this project out of pure philanthropy."

"Why not?"

Yakimenko shrugged his shoulders sceptically. A motive of this kind was beyond his comprehension. "Is that really so? Of course, it's your affair. Have you considered the possibility that this convalescent Camp might be taken over by the G.U.L.A.G., and, in that event, Comrade Katz might be appointed overseer to instruct your brother?"

The same idea had occurred to me.

"Moreover," continued Yakimenko ironically, "I might as well tell you honestly that if I'd been in the shoes of the G.P.U., I would long since have sent all three of you packing. Failing that, you are always likely to be up to some tricks."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said—but that is, after all, only my personal opinion."

"I wish you would communicate your personal opinion to the G.P.U. Then perhaps they would release us."

Yakimenko shrugged his shoulders, dropped his cigarette, and left the room without further remark.

Boris and Yura were waiting for me outside.

"Well," I remarked, not without malice, "I think we're already in the soup, as I predicted. How about it?"

"Your fears are entirely groundless," said Boris.

"It is not a question of my fears, but of the fact that you have antagonised Miss Katz to the point where you will never get what you want. On the contrary, you are likely to become her unfortunate subordinate. That's hardly my idea of an earthly paradise."

"I don't agree. All the others are backing us up."

"And what's the good of that if the whole scheme is put under the G.U.L.A.G.?"

At that point Yakimenko appeared: "Ha! The three musketeers—together as usual."

"We were just discussing to-day's eventful meeting."

"Didn't I tell you to expect an amusing meeting?" In Yakimenko's tone, as he made further ribald remarks, was a new intimacy which puzzled me completely. "I want you to edit your minutes thoroughly, Ivan Lukianovich, by to-morrow morning, and put all your literary skill into the job. It is essential to have a full report of Comrade Katz's proceedings available. It will, of course, be signed by everyone present, except Comrade Katz." Noticing my apprehensive expression, he added: "There is nothing for you to be afraid of. I have never, up to now, attacked you."

I was still puzzled as to his meaning, and, to gain time for thought, asked him: "Is she really intimate with the leaders?"

"Before the Revolution, perhaps. At that time she was in Siberia, and where there are no birds, even a cat may look like a nightingale. Anyhow, it's a dying race. Make a good job of your minutes."

We did. Everybody signed them, except Comrade Katz. The next day she packed up her traps and left for Moscow. Yakimenko followed her by the next train.

*Party Strife*

We returned to our quarters in silence and somewhat depressed. It was plain that nothing but futility could come out of the scheme, and meanwhile, we had become involved in a party intrigue. In such a situation the Communist may win or lose, but the non-party man always loses. Why this should be so, it is hard to say, but of the fact there is no doubt whatever. Within the party cell everyone is busily engaged in getting the better of the others. It would be impossible for us to adopt a neutral attitude, and, whether we liked it or not, we should have to side with Yakimenko. In Moscow Comrade Katz would be in her element, and supported by all the Activists who might expect her to do something for them, while Yakimenko, Wiedemann, and the rest were likely to count for little. It remained to be seen how much power was still vested in the 'old guard'.

Yakimenko himself obviously had connections in Moscow, or he would not have gone there. He would certainly not present the minutes either to G.U.L.A.G. or to the G.P.U., but show them in whatever quarter his influence was the strongest. Thence they might eventually penetrate to the Moscow Party Committee, or to the Party Control Commission. All the enemies of Comrade Katz would be arrayed against her, while her friends would naturally be active on her behalf. Yakimenko, no doubt, had strong hopes of coming off best. Moreover, he had great self-control, and was much cleverer than Comrade Katz. There was also in his favour the fact that Katz belonged to the 'old guard' of Leninists, who are continually, though unobtrusively, being liquidated by the Stalinists. Yakimenko definitely belonged to the younger and victorious faction. I had, of course, no

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knowledge of what earlier clashes had occurred between the two. Comrade Katz would no doubt pose as a martyr to the cause of World Revolution, while Yakimenko would probably call her a fool for her pains, adding that her hero, Lenin, had been dead a long time, that it was high time for her to join him, and that intelligent modern Communists preferred to sacrifice other people's lives rather than their own.

In Russian *émigré* circles there is often talk of national revival, to be carried out by men like Starodubtsev, Yakimenko, Jagoda, Kaganovich, and Stalin. No one in Russia itself believes any such thing. It is quite probable that Yakimenko and his like will eventually come into power, but the existing system of so-called Communism is not likely to be substantially modified. Those who, like myself, remained in Russia, have no belief in Bolshevism nor any similar system, and are little concerned with the future prospects of the Revolution.

Meanwhile, it is clear that the Leninist 'old guard' has almost reached its last days. A certain number of frenzied enthusiasts remain, but they count for less and less daily. It must, however, be acknowledged that a close bond unites the members of Stalinist circles, and reaches from the highest to the lowest. Stalin could not dispense with Jagoda, nor Jagoda with Yakimenko, and so on, while the converse is equally true.

As there was nothing to eat in our hut, we lay down to rest, but I was too excited to sleep. All the maddening experiences of recent months kept rising to the surface of my mind. I felt that despite my descent from healthy, long-lived peasant stock, and my former giant strength, the sufferings I had undergone had left me, at forty-two, almost an old man. My hair had turned white.

At length I arose and wandered out into a quiet and frosty night of snow-covered fields and frozen streams. Suddenly, I heard eight rifle-shots in quick succession crackling through the air. They seemed to come from the direction of the Dikov ravine, which I had been foolish enough to visit a month before. This ravine was strewn with an enormous number of corpses of slain men and starved beasts, from the latter of which the Camp dwellers sometimes cut off frozen steaks for their dinner in times of famine. Horror gripped me at the recollection. A cold sweat broke out on my forehead. . . .

I came to myself at last, with Boris and Yura anxiously supporting me, while my heart still beat violently, and the sweat continued to run down my face. They undressed me and put me to bed.

### *Nadejda Constantinovna*

With the departure of Yakimenko and Comrade Katz for Moscow, the Liquidation Commission resumed its ordinary activities. The officials of Svir Camp returned to their own headquarters, leaving a representative behind in Podporozhie to carry on the unending hostilities with Wiedemann. The Svir Camp wanted all the intellectuals it could get, even those suffering from scurvy and other diseases, while W.B.C. was reluctant to surrender any individual of value, and neither side desired to look after the sick and unfortunate peasants. We were able to take a hand in these negotiations between the respective 'slave holders', through our connection with the Liquidation Commission and with Nadejda Constantinovna. Compared with Svir, W.B.C. might be designated a Camp of aristocrats, especially with regard to the treatment of its inmates. In addition to our natural



desire to do what we could for our unfortunate fellow prisoners, we gave much thought to our own position and prospects, and were fearful lest the three of us should be separated, in view of the methods of liquidation prevailing. We decided that, having regard to all the circumstances, the best policy to pursue would be to get all three of us transferred to Svir. The transfer itself presented no difficulty, but we made the capital mistake of omitting to obtain reliable information as to the conditions prevailing in the Camp. We discovered in due course that the supervision of 'counter-revolutionaries', imprisoned for offences similar to ours, was almost barbarous in its severity, and, further, that the separate Divisions were all completely surrounded with barbed wire, precluding any exchanges of visits, except with a special passport. Moreover, it appeared that the Svir authorities contemplated dispatching most of the Intelligentsia, taken over from W.B.C., to the most distant stations, where the administrative methods were careless in the extreme. When we weighed up our chances, while poring over the map of the Svir administration, prospects appeared more gloomy than ever. This administration embraced a very large territory, with some Camps as far as 250 miles from the frontier, from which they were separated by a well-settled and well-guarded area. Our names were already included in the Svir lists.

We expressed our fears to Nadejda Constantinovna, who was in charge of the technical department of the Liquidation Commission, but she asserted that nothing could be done, and remarked on the proverbial instability of the male. I replied that nothing was impossible to a woman—*ce que la femme veut, Dieu le veut*. Thereupon a series of complicated bureaucratic trickeries was carried

out, following which Nadejda Constantinovna appeared in our hut, looking like a Cleopatra who had just succeeded in outwitting her Antony. Our names had been struck off the lists of the Svir Camp, and restored to the W.B.C. list. Nadejda Constantinovna beamed, and, while Yura kissed her hand, I added that I should pray for her all my life, and likewise do her typing, conduct her meetings, and anything else she wanted done.

Much of our subsequent memory of the Liquidation Commission as a kind of paradise on earth was quite definitely due to Nadejda Constantinovna, with her charming feminine and maternal qualities, as well as her playful quarrelling with Yura, whom she almost adopted, and actually succeeded in persuading to comb his hair and keep his nails clean. As a matter of fact, Yura was quite unable to resist her.

Nadejda Constantinovna was, nevertheless, a very nervous woman, who could not always keep her head, though, despite all this, she was as helpful as possible to everyone she encountered. Many an engineer begged her to save him from the terrors of Svir, although she had no authority to do anything of the kind. After rejecting all such entreaties and sending her suppliant away more or less in despair, Nadejda Constantinovna would be overcome by her natural kindness, and turn to me for advice as to what trick would be most effective to keep the man in question on the W.B.C. list. Usually this involved changing an engineer into a miner, or effecting some other startling metamorphosis, as the circumstances might require. Nadejda Constantinovna would sigh and moan over these demands on her good nature, but proved to be tireless in well-doing, so that in the end the Svir Camp received very few intellectuals from W.B.C.

These manipulations involved me in little risk, but were far more dangerous to the lady concerned.

She was still a young woman of only thirty-two or thirty-three years, attractive and endowed with considerable sex appeal. Quite frankly, she regarded her sex appeal as her capital, to be employed in the most advantageous manner. In the Soviet Union this would naturally point in the direction of marriage with some eminent Communist. During the long evenings when we were engaged on the work of the Liquidation Commission she told me her personal story. She came of a highly educated family and, herself, spoke several languages. She took the obvious course, under the circumstances, of marrying a distinguished Communist, who, however, became involved in a Trotskyist trial, and was dispatched into the great beyond. This left Nadejda once more alone, except for a little son, a year and a half old. Naturally enough, her husband's former colleagues dropped her acquaintance, since it is bad policy to cultivate 'class enemies'. Thereupon, she returned to her typewriter, which did not at first relieve her from privation or from continual dread as to the future of the widow of a murdered official.

Nadejda decided not to make such a mistake a second time. Her capital would have to be reinvested in a thoroughly 'solid' undertaking. In consequence, she married a disciple of Lenin, by name Andrei Ivanovich Sapevski, who occupied a number of positions of the highest importance in Soviet circles. After a short period of peace, marked by the advent of a second child, the second husband was condemned to ten years in a Concentration Camp for Right-Wing tendencies.

By dint of enormous exertions and endless wire-

pulling, Andrei Ivanovich succeeded, after three years, in obtaining the exceedingly rare privilege of having his family join him in Camp, which included the possession of a hut of their own but admitted no further relaxations of Camp rules.

He had become a thin, permanently embittered man of about fifty, clever, hard, and cynical—characteristics naturally developed by his experiences. Knowing the circumstances, I was the more perturbed by the occasional proprietorial manner in which Wiedemann placed his hairy paw on the slightly shrinking shoulders of Nadejda Constantinovna. I had cherished some hopes of more congenial employment under Andrei Ivanovich for Yura and myself, as foremen in the forestry division. He had given us some technical books to study, and we had begun to dream of the time we might spend pleasantly in the woods, instead of bent over our typewriters.

One day, as I was returning to my hut at noon, Nadejda Constantinovna overtook me, and we walked down together. Suddenly she said, uneasily: "Look, isn't that my Ljubik?"

The small black figure silhouetted against the snow some distance away might well have been her child, whom I had never previously seen, but, in any case, I could not distinguish features so far away without my glasses. The child turned out to be her son, no doubt on his way back from school. Suddenly Nadejda cried out: "Oh! my God, his face is all bloody."

Whereupon the little boy, turning round and recognising his mother, began to shriek at the top of his voice. He was about eight years old, and his features bore all the evidences of a recent fight. As the matter was plainly not

serious, I felt no undue pity for the boy, and finally asked him :

“Listen, Ljubik, you hit him, too, didn’t you?”

According to Ljubik, they had pommelled each other, and I then asked the technical question whether he had hit the other boy with his right or his left, after which I proceeded to show him, at his request, the best way of hitting with one’s left. On the strength of this instruction I was christened ‘uncle’, and promoted to the position of practical instructor. The boy and I became fast friends. The walk ended at Nadejda Constantinovna’s hut, which I then entered for the first time, and found it, although sizeable, poorly furnished and empty enough. Subsequently I was invited to share a plate of soup with the family, since Nadejda was entitled to draw Cheka rations, not, of course, of the first or second category, but still sufficient to assure her family of adequate nourishment. Presently Andrei Ivanovich arrived, and began to talk with his son, in some peculiar dialect of their own, which was incomprehensible to me.

They had secured some kind of permanence in their way of living which, despite Camp discomfort, had become precious to Nadejda, so that, when her husband mentioned the possibility of being ordered elsewhere, there was great dismay. In fact, Nadejda became actually hysterical at the prospect, as she had reason to dread the designs of Comrade Wiedemann.

Presently Yura appeared, and was strangely successful in some fashion that I failed to grasp in his efforts to console Nadejda Constantinovna. I realised to the full how bitter life was for Andrei Ivanovich, stripped as it was of all his former Soviet illusions. I sympathised with him, but scarcely knew how to offer consolation.

In June of the same year, while travelling through the woods a long distance from Camp, I met Andrei Ivanovich once more. He tried to pass me without recognition. Nevertheless, I approached him and asked after Nadejda Constantinovna. With a desolation and bitterness impossible to describe, he at last managed to utter the words: "She is no longer among the living."

## SVIR CAMP

*The Planning Division at Svir*

I was eventually transferred from the Liquidation Commission of W.B.C. to the staff of the Podporozhie Division of Svir Camp. The staff worked in the clean and roomy quarters formerly occupied by one of the division chiefs of the W.B.C. I was appointed an administrative planner, but told next to nothing about the duties I was supposed to perform. Every Soviet institution includes a planning division, the members of which are never given any definite instructions. As the Soviet administration always operates as a planned economy, all the divisions it comprises are perpetually employed in threshing empty chaff.

This kind of employment fell to my lot. It so happened that no planning division had yet been organised, and it was up to me to create one with the utmost promptitude, as otherwise the Camp would lag behind in the 'socialistic upbuilding of the country'. The difficulty which arose here, as in most Soviet undertakings, was the lack of all data for rational planning. For instance, it might easily happen, without the planning division knowing anything about it, that five or ten thousand peasants would to-day be removed from the Camp, while to-morrow two to three thousand Urks would in like fashion be delivered to the Camp. Bread might arrive to-day, while to-morrow

there would be none. Similarly, weather conditions would make all the difference in the world to the amount of tree felling and wood cutting by a horde of half-naked prisoners, incapable of withstanding a heavy frost or extremely mild weather. My own fate was a case in point. Yesterday a typist in the Liquidation Commission, to-day head of a mythical planning division, and to-morrow perhaps busy cutting down trees in the woods! Under such conditions planning is always a farce.

I began my duties by making a general study of the Svir Camp. My first discovery was that its function was primarily to provide firewood, and only secondarily did it furnish lumber for Leningrad building purposes and for export. Such lumber was first transported to various co-operative and other agencies, in order to conceal its origin.

The Camp consisted of about 70,000 prisoners, with daily fluctuations between five and ten thousand. The Intelligentsia comprised no more than two and a half per cent, much less than in the W.B.C., whereas the labourers amounted to about twenty-two per cent and the Urks to about twelve per cent. The remainder were mainly peasants, drawn largely from West Siberia.

The whole Camp was, in comparison with the W.B.C., a very poor affair. Rations were cut down to the point where they barely kept the prisoners alive. The stock of provisions was so small that the slightest hitch in transport arrangements plunged the Camp into a state of starvation, with the most serious effect on tree-felling operations. Our rations consisted of almost uneatable bread, spoiled sauerkraut, and semi-decayed fish. Even barley porridge was seldom given to the prisoners. The normal bread ration was fifteen per cent less than at the



W.B.C. The fish was often so rotten as to cause an epidemic of ptomaine poisoning. The output of the Camp would, in consequence, fall to zero, while the Camp Chief would be hauled over the coals, although he would never dare to report the real cause of the epidemic—the quality of the fish—since the fish emanated from the same quarter that sent the rebuke. What to do, under such conditions, or to whom to complain, was an unanswerable question.

### *Inventory*

Our Division was required to furnish daily meticulous reports of work done. In one of these forms there was a special column headed 'Production deficiencies due to lack of shoes and clothing'. Towards the end of the winter, with heavy frosts, the figures in this column increased to catastrophic magnitude. There was an appalling shortage of clothes and shoes; and, simultaneously, the numbers of sick and frozen people soared, and there was an alarming increase in the number of cases of self-inflicted injuries, made to avoid working in the woods half naked and thus exposed to almost certain death.

It was abundantly evident that conditions in other Camps were no better, and we received orders from G.U.L.A.G. to compile an inventory of all clothing and shoes on hand in Camp, including our own. Subsequently, we were instructed to make a fresh distribution of all the available clothing, to ensure that the brigades working in the woods should be clothed, so far as this was practicable.

The difficulty with us was that almost everybody in Camp was already half naked. It was then decided to strip, almost to complete nudity, certain sections like

'Weak Strength' and the 'Urks', and to commandeer the shoes and slippers of all domestics. A particular uniform, consisting of odds and ends of brightly coloured rags, was designed for the Urks, in an effort to prevent them from continually drinking and gambling away their clothes.

### *Plundering the Half-Naked*

The function referred to in the preceding chapter was supposed to be performed by the technical Intelligentsia, without any definite instructions as to the method they were to follow. Consequently, I set out on a seven-mile walk from Podporozhie to one of the other Camps.

I left without any guard, during a severe frost, which, however, I rather enjoyed, as I still had a sweater of my own, a leather windbreaker, and my old W.B.C. *bushlat*, not to mention good W.B.C. Arctics, illegally acquired, on my feet. I was feeling strong and healthy, with the aid of two big packages recently received from the outside world, although, to our regret, two further packages from the same source had been stolen.

I found the Camp encircled with heavy barbed wire and watched over by guards. My own papers were carefully examined at the entrance. It was evident that no communication between this Camp and others, except through regular channels, was possible. The whole population was confined to barracks.

In order to save the precious working time, it had been arranged to take the inventory on a holiday. It is, in fact, a rule for the rare holidays to be devoted to something or other, so that the prisoners derive no enjoyment or benefit from them.

I had previously thought that in this country, com-

prising one-sixth of the earth's surface, everything tangible had been seized. It turned out that I was mistaken. On this occasion we plundered such poor and miserable creatures that it seemed as though nothing more could be taken from them, unless it should be their skins, to be tanned for purposes of export.

### *Hell Let Loose*

The barracks were very hot and you could cut the air with a knife. A crowd of Activists, prisoners, and bosses of one kind or another were tearing about and creating a terrific din and uproar. Scattered about were batches of shockingly ragged individuals, with haggard and pitiful faces.

At one end of the barrack was a table for the Commission. In truth, I was all the Commission there was. The unfortunate prisoners were rounded up at the other end of the room. There was no trace of Yakimenko's occasional courtesy, but plenty of cuffs and curses.

In front of me was a heap of little exercise books, each supposed to contain a record of supplies of one kind or another issued to an individual prisoner. The books were the commonest kind procurable, and the writing in lead pencil was mostly illegible. Many of the wretched conscripts had been compelled to sign for articles they had never received, owing to the prevalent swindling. Yet they were held responsible for everything that had ever been theoretically issued to them, and the poor little allowance of three roubles a month, on which they depended for makhorka and other slight alleviations of prison existence, was frequently forfeited owing to their inability to produce articles they had never possessed or which had long since been worn out.

The usual procedure was to summon each individual by name, and order him to produce at once, for the inspection of the Commission, all his worldly goods. Warders would then search him, to ascertain whether he had anything concealed about his person that might be confiscated. Never in my life had I seen such dirt, hunger, poverty, and rags, at one time.

The reason the barrack was kept so hot was that every one was half naked to begin with. If a man was wearing two ragged shirts and the Commission took one of them away, he would, of course, feel the cold considerably. Although I pleaded hard against plundering these poor wretches of their few remaining rags, at the end of the stock-taking we had accumulated a big heap of lousy rags, which would have seemed too bad even for the dustbins of a bourgeois country.

Depressed by the filth of these poor wretches, I asked the Camp Commander whether they were never bathed, to which he replied: "Since they have practically no clothes, they very naturally don't want to wash."

### *Death and Destruction*

Division Nineteen was, although not officially, a penal establishment. In consequence, there were thrust upon us any number of thieves, Urks, and other minor criminals, whom, unfortunately, we had to accept. As usual, the Urks seemed less famished and better clothed than the unfortunate peasants.

I recall, as if it were to-day, a gigantic Siberian peasant, who must once have possessed superhuman strength. When his shirt was removed during the inventory I could detect enormous bones and muscles, although substantially impaired by famine. Some of his muscles

had almost completely disappeared, leaving ~~only~~ traces of their former existence against his stark ribs. I asked him for what crime he was atoning in Camp.

He replied: "For being a kulak."

Inquiring further as to the direct cause, he showed me the stump of his left hand, whereupon everything became clear to me.

In the construction of canals, explosives, carelessly used or even deliberately misused, were responsible for thousands of such mutilations. How could such a giant subsist on four hundred grammes of bread daily? Such a man needed at least five pounds of bread to maintain even half of his muscular strength, instead of which, under the Soviet system, he was allowed to become a wreck.

In the case of a group of Daghestan peasants, I was able to let them keep at least a portion of their national costume. Much good would this do them. Sometime within the next year they would inevitably perish from hunger, tuberculosis, or scurvy, in a climate to which they could not adapt themselves. Shortly before we finished taking the inventory, a little old man of perhaps sixty, trembling with weakness, began to take off his clothes in front of me. His book read: "Avdejev A.S., Teacher of Mathematics, age 42!" A year younger than I, and it was a weak old man that confronted me. I asked him his name to make sure, when he readily answered:

"Yes, yes, I am Avdejev."

To hell with it all!

Towards the end of this distressing task I was able, despite their protests, to moderate the Activists and other attendants in their exactions. So it was possible for me to tell the unfortunate Avdejev to keep his few poor garments and go away.

The inventory was over, and I found myself trembling and exhausted from the horrors I had just experienced. The Camp Commander censured me for having delivered the smallest quantity of clothes of any barrack. I answered him less roughly than he had spoken to me, but sharply enough. There was nothing to be done in the circumstances.

*Professor Avdejev*

On the staff of the Svir Camp a group of the Intelligentsia gradually formed. Our experiences were calculated to cure the most fanatical Soviet enthusiast. I recall one such enthusiast, called Harry, who had achieved some fame as a writer of serials for *Izvestia*. Through some mishap, he was suddenly banished to the Solovetsky Islands, where he remained a year. When his offence, real or alleged, had been reviewed, he was permitted to return. In moments of anger he used to say: "Why, in Heaven's name, did you show me all these horrible things, or give me the opportunity to see them? After all, I was once a believer."

At first I was inclined to doubt Harry's veracity. I had experienced the utmost difficulty in believing some of Boris's stories about the wholesale destruction of life occurring in these islands, despite the fact that he rarely exaggerated. I thought there was a natural and unconscious tendency in every human being to dramatise personal experiences, which needed to be discounted. Moreover, there are some things that are too dreadful to credit, from which the human mind inevitably recoils. Despite all this, Harry continued to write for *Izvestia*, which seemed incredible in the circumstances. The little group of the Intelligentsia in the Svir Camp had formulated a very

simple, though drastic, political creed. In this Gargantuan meat-grinder known as the Soviet Union the first duty of man was to look after his own safety. Of course, the group did not fare so well as the Activists in the matter of food and lodging, so it concentrated on two main policies: to exaggerate the output of work and to earn the maximum (at least in theory) supplies of provisions. The confusion created by our spurious figures had subsequently to be cleared up by the North-Western Forest Trust and its ancillary bodies. In the matter of bread, we sometimes obtained enough, and sometimes had to go without. At the next meeting of the group I told the story of the unfortunate Avdejev, with the result that his hard case was alleviated without delay. Boris succeeded in transferring Avdejev from Division Nineteen to the 'Weak Strength', which meant 700 grammes of bread per day instead of 300. Such an increase of bread ration as this makes all the difference between life and death. Presently Avdejev, bathed, deloused, and better nourished, came to sit by the stove in our hut and related the melancholy story of his career.

He had been formerly a professor of mathematics in Minsk. First of all, his brother was imprisoned and then shot for espionage. The Professor and his wife and daughter were subsequently banished to the Concentration Camp at Kem, in the Vischera Division. Wife and daughter both died in Camp.

Avdejev told us these things in hesitant fashion, as though he had almost lost the gift of speech. "My daughter was really an excellent pianist, you might even say a composer, but in Kem she was employed as a washerwoman. You know what laundry work means in the Camps. She was there with thirteen other women, all

prostitutes. What kind of life that must have been for my innocent child of eighteen you can imagine for yourselves." The Professor's ageing face, disfigured by frost-bite, one ear practically gone, and dried-up lips, twitched convulsively as he said this.

"The good God might have called my poor child home to Him to save her from suicide. At that time there was one good soul, even among these fallen women. I happened to be working in the book-keeping department of the Camp about twelve miles from Kem—a kind of labour quite as irksome as washing or as imprisonment for capital crimes under the Czars. I was chained to a table, instead of to a wheel-barrow. That was the only difference. I slept at the table, I ate at the table, and I worked at the table for fifteen hours a day. For weeks I never left that table, except for the latrine. That's the sort of job it was, and the head of the division was just a wild beast. One day I was called to the telephone. I heard a woman's voice: 'Are you Avdejev?' I had a presentiment of disaster. The voice went on: 'Have you a daughter working with us in the laundry?' 'Yes, that's my daughter.' 'Well,' said the voice, 'your daughter is lying at the point of death. If you can come over this evening, it is just possible that you will find her alive.'

"My limbs would support me no longer. I groped for a stool, and fell down, unconscious, dragging the receiver with me. They poured water over me until consciousness returned. I implored my chief to give me leave of absence for one night, so that I could see my dying daughter for the last time. The wild beast! Do you know what he answered me? 'Thousands,' he said, 'die here every day. This is no health resort for daughters of noble birth. We cannot postpone our



urgent calculations because of any dying whore? Yes, that is just what he said.

"I crept through the door into the street, nearly crazy and feeling as though my legs had no bones in them. I did not care what happened. Through the pitch darkness and the thawing snow I headed for Kem. I walked and walked, lost my way several times, and finally reached the Camp as morning dawned.

"Olga had died before my arrival. Later they caught me in the 'House of the Dead' of that Camp, and packed me off to work in the woods, on the charge of attempted escape. I hadn't even been allowed to see the corpse of my own child."

The poor old man's meagre frame shook with suppressed sobs. I gave him some sauerkraut juice, which he drank automatically. His teeth chattered against the edge of the glass, while the contents spilled over his clothing. Boris laid a friendly and reassuring hand on his shoulder and said to him: "Calm yourself, my dear fellow. We are all in the same boat. All we Russians are confronted with the same fate. Under the Soviets death is made easy for a man."

"Death is not for you three," continued Avdejev in a trembling voice, in which, nevertheless, there was an undertone of firm conviction, almost, perhaps, of hostility. "You three are not doomed to destruction. It is one thing for a man to be imprisoned, quite another thing for a woman. You men can still depend on your strong fists. In Russia to-day, Boris Lukianovich, we are back in the fifteenth century. Here in Camp we are really living as in prehistoric ages. Only a strong beast can survive these conditions."

"I don't think of myself as a beast," I commented.

"Perhaps not, Ivan Lukianovich—perhaps not, but at least you have a powerful punch. I have noticed that even the men from the Operative Division are afraid of you. I, on the other hand, am just an intellectual, and I have never developed my muscles. I had conceived myself as living in the twentieth century, and never anticipated returning to the Tertiary Epoch. Yet that is just what has happened to me, and I must perish because I don't belong to that period. You should not have removed me from Division Nineteen, Ivan Lukianovich, for it is all in vain."

In the face of my evident astonishment, he said: "Don't think, for Heaven's sake, Ivan Lukianovich, that I am not extremely grateful to you, and that I don't understand that you did it with the noblest intentions."

"With quite ordinary and natural intentions, Professor Avdejev."

"Yes, yes, I understand," Avdejev went on, "that it was with the simplest impulse of humanity—perhaps just the impulse of class solidarity of the Intelligentsia." Again the bitter dispassionate irony of his tone made itself felt. "But you must realise that it was a needlessly barbarous thing, all the same."

I was somewhat taken aback at Avdejev's attitude, which seemed to me to suggest some abnormal mental condition.

"Please don't be insulted," continued Avdejev, "or think of me as an ungrateful rascal or an old lunatic—though, of course, I really am an old lunatic! And that is so, in spite of the fact that I am really younger than you. None the less, I am, in effect, a worthless wreck of a man. Look, I have even lost my fingers from frost-bite."

He held out a hand, which was almost fingerless. There

was about him something of an odour of putrefaction, which I had previously attributed to the frost-bites on his cheeks, nose, and ears. But his hand was in a still worse condition.

"Just look at my fingers. As a matter of fact, I am rotten through and through—my heart is as bad as my hand. I have lost my brother, my wife, and my only daughter, and have no one left me. Espionage? What a diabolical joke! My brother was a microbiologist, and never showed his face outside his laboratory. We had relatives in Poland in a place that had formerly been a part of Russia. Naturally, we corresponded with them, and when one of them sent my brother a microscope, the gift sealed his fate! My daughter, my wife, and I were no more spies than he. I am sorry to-day that there was no truth in the charge. If there had been, I should at least have had some sense of justification, and mightn't have felt that my dear ones and I had all died in vain. If I could at least feel I had truly opposed this dynasty of Satan in some fashion, death would not be so bitter.

"I admit that I was never any more religious than most of the Russian Intellectuals. How could I believe in any such nonsense as the existence of Satan? But, to-day, I *do* believe in him, because I have seen him, because I still see him daily in every Camp. He exists, Ivan Lukianovich; he is no Popish invention; he is an actual living Reality."

I could see Yura becoming paler and paler. There was something truly Apocalyptic in this poor, half-rotted mathematician, to whom Satan had become a living reality. I thought of all the various Camps in this Arctic region, and as the snow storm without made the windows rattle I could almost feel that it was Satan himself rattling them with derisive, triumphant laughter. Inex-

plicably, Satan suddenly took on for me the figure of Yakimenko.

"Tell me honestly, Boris Lukianovich," Avdejev went on, "on your honour as a physician, have I the slightest chance, is there the least probability of my surviving the eight years of Camp imprisonment which are still before me?"

"Why, yes, if you will learn to calm yourself, and accustom yourself to it as a more or less normal way of life," began Boris, though without any conviction in his tone.

"So, I am to restrain myself after losing everything near and dear to me! I am to sit down at a table in the staff office, compose myself, and become accustomed to Camp as a normal way of life?"

"Ah! you still have the protection of your fists," continued Avdejev. "I am supposed to be able again to work my sixteen hours a day, and yet, with these hands of mine, I can't work eight hours. In fact, I will never be able to work again! And even your fists will never bring me safely through those eight years.

"I am really deeply grateful to you, Ivan Lukianovich, for your noble intentions. You remember how I stood in front of you unbuttoning my trousers, and through your sympathetic generosity I was enabled to keep the last pair of trousers I possessed. No, no, don't interrupt me, Ivan Lukianovich," he went on with hysterical satire, "you may have risked your own trousers, even, perhaps, your own fists on my behalf through this action, and yet you should have left me on the ash heap of Division Nineteen! There I had almost succeeded in calming myself in attaining the blind and impervious peace of a block of wood. There I was near to death—you under-

stand, the release of death. And now in face of the Satanic dance of Camp existence that awaits friendishly to trip us up, you talk to me of a normal way of life! Do you expect me to believe that the devil will be satisfied without having captured the last surviving representative of my family? Satan will suck the last drop of blood available out of the whole Socialistic edifice, despite your fists, despite everything, and yet you expect to escape him by flight. Don't misunderstand me, Ivan Lukianovich, or worry because of any crazy thing I may have said. I am not yet quite mad. The matter of escape is entirely your own business. God grant you succeed in it, and I wish you luck. Perhaps you will be able to escape from this country, and once again I will descend into the pit of death and destruction alone. You dragged me out of the ashpit that I might descend into it once more. Can't you see that there are only two roads possible to me—a hole in the ice of the River Svir, or a return to Division Nineteen, which is waiting—waiting for me and trying to get me back. Even escape through a hole in the ice probably requires more strength than I possess. It is no light and pleasant thing to be as conscious of one's final agony as I am. So good-bye, Ivan Lukianovich, with many thanks for what you have done. I must go."

Avdejev held out an almost fingerless hand in farewell, drew it back hastily before I could grasp it, and turned to the door. Boris made a movement as though to accompany him.

"No, no," said Avdejev, "no escort, please. The barrack is quite near, and I can find my way there easily. Don't forget that I once got as far as Kem alone and at night, although it is true that, on that occasion, I had Satan for my guide."

Avdejev disappeared, with Boris following him. I could hear their voices growing gradually fainter through the storm. Yura and I looked at each other in painful silence. In a few moments Boris returned, and looked uncertainly about the room and through the window out into the storm. "Va," he said to me finally. "Have you any money?"

"Yes, why?"

"Vodka would be a good thing now. Two litres each. I would pawn my last pair of trousers this minute for some vodka."

### *Apotheosis of Avdejev*

While Boris was away in quest of illicit vodka, Yura and I continued to sit in bitter unbroken silence. No doubt we were both thinking of the tragedy of Avdejev, and what might be the sequel. Somehow the picture of Satan continued to connect itself in my mind with Yakimenko, and such activities as might be occupying his time.

Boris returned with the vodka and a few odds and ends of rations which he had managed to collect, and we crowded round the stove to eat and drink companionably. Yura inquired whether it wouldn't be possible to transfer Avdejev to the hospital. Boris answered slowly that he had been refused permission to accommodate seven men with frozen feet, not to mention five attempted suicides. We sat brooding, and after a further silence Yura inquired if there was no way to help Avdejev.

"No," answered Boris. "There is, necessarily, only an occasional case that we can risk trying to help. Under the circumstances, we want to reserve these opportunities for people with some possible future. Avdejev has none."

"Then we really were guilty of a stupidity in-rescuing him from Division Nineteen," remarked Yura.

"Yes," said Boris. "That was just a case of Ivan surrendering to an impulse of pity."

"Would you say that our B.A.M. lists were equally pieces of futility?" asked Yura.

"Yes," said Boris.

Yura continued to muse over this: "I still want to know why you think our B.A.M. lists were futile."

After some consideration Boris answered him: "Look, Yura, what good does it do? All these people are doomed, anyway, like Avdejev. I have been equally foolish myself with some of my invalids, but that does not affect the question."

"How about your Convalescent Camp idea?" I interrupted. "Is that going to do anything more than prolong a number of lives already doomed?"

"The Convalescent Camp is a different matter, as that has a chance of becoming a permanent institution. For the matter of that, I haven't attacked your lists, but I am clear-sighted enough to see things as they really are. You must see that there is nothing that can be done for anyone here, except the occasional possibility of flight."

"When we were in Saltykovka," continued Boris, "you were inclined to think my accounts of the Solovetsky Islands exaggerated, and Yura practically accused me of lying. You are going to find out presently that almost as horrible things are likely to happen here in the future, and that my point of view is a sane one."

At last we ceased to talk about the unfortunate Avdejev, and began concentrating once more on our own future.

Later, one of our colleagues was clever enough to find

a suitable position for poor Avdejev. He was to be put in charge of the switchboard of a non-existent but duly planned central telephone station for the Svir Camp. That night Boris stumbled into our hut, and said quietly that all was now well with Avdejev.

"Didn't I say," began Yura joyfully, "that everything would turn out well, if one took sufficient pains?"

Boris cleared his throat and looked curiously at Yura. "I have just signed his death certificate. After he left us he may have lost his way. In any event, he was found in the morning, quite dead, in a snowdrift behind the electric station."

Yura became pitifully silent. Boris stepped to the window and gazed intently into the stormy night.



## CHAPTER VIII

### EPILOGUE

A WIRE was received from Moscow. "Pogra Camp to be transferred to G.U.L.A.G., including inventory and all inmates. Transfers from the Camp now strictly forbidden."

" Yura told me the news by telephone. We had been pulling wires every day in an effort to get transferred to Medgora, and were hourly expecting a confirmation of our transfer. Meanwhile, the wire just received meant that Boris belonged to Pogra, and it looked as if we might be separated. At the back of the telegram one could glimpse the threatening shadow of Comrade Katz, who might be expected to appear at any time to take charge of her new possessions and to intimidate Boris with cigarette holder and revolver. Boris thought that we should try to escape without losing a single day. In the evening Boris came to our hut to discuss the prospects of flight on the morrow. During the night he called to me to bring him a glass of water. When giving him the water I felt his pulse, which registered a beat of 120, and indicated the return of his old enemy, malaria. Any immediate attempt at escape was clearly out of the question.

On March 15th I was summoned to an evening meeting of the Liquidation Commission and told that I was being sent to the W.B.C. at Medgora. It was explained

that Yura and I, together with eight others, were needed to check the inmates of the W.B.C., and the party was to leave at six o'clock the following morning.

I was confirmed in my opinion that Boris's illness had been a blessing in disguise during our sixteen days' march through the Karelian Taiga, which convinced me that such a journey as we contemplated was impossible in winter. At the moment, of course, Boris's illness seemed like one more blow from fate, to add to our previous misfortunes. However, there was nothing for it but to obey orders, and early the following morning we bade Boris a brief and sorrowful farewell.

Before we parted we reached a definite understanding that we would both attempt to escape early on the morning of the following 28th of July, whatever the circumstances of the moment might be.

So once more 'a last farewell'. It was not the first. But what prospects had we of ever making our escape? In the gloom of these minutes it seemed that we had none at all. We went through the still dark streets of Podporozhie, and I remembered the previous 'last farewell', in November 1926, when Boris was sent to the Solovetsky Islands for five years.

From Podporozhie we proceeded to the station under a weak escort. The commander was a young fellow just over twenty, who had been sent to a Camp for murder combined with official irregularities. He thought it a huge joke to go splashing through the melting snow in the sunshine with his top-boots. He gossiped, sung, and told stories of his military experience. He even succeeded in distracting me from my own melancholy thoughts for a brief space.

On arrival at the station, he cleared half a carriage for the eight of us, and expelled the remaining travellers.

"Our inmates also need room. These blockheads snore every night in their beds, so we will at least travel bourgeois for once."

The train moved out of the station. We approached Medgora. The Podporozhic period was over. What a short time—only sixty-eight days! What adventures and perils were in store for us in Medgora?

END OF PART I

## GLOSSARY

Administrative exile	Exile by orders of the G.P.U., without trial. The commonest form of banishment in the Soviet Union.
B.A.M.	Baikal-Amur Railway; the railway from the northern extremity of Lake Baikal to the estuary of the River Amur in the Far East.
Bushlat	Uniform of Camp inmates. As described in text, a jacket formed of two layers of cotton with interlining.
Dmitlag	Moscow-Volga Canal Project.
Donbas	The Donetsk Coal-field.
Dynamo	Sports organisation of the G.P.U., distributed all over the Soviet Union.
G.U.L.A.G.	Chief administration of the compulsory labour Camps of the G.P.U. Seat in Moscow.
Insnaab	Food distribution centre for foreigners.
Izvestia	Official organ of the Government.
Khaltura	The word is untranslatable. It signifies a combination of jobbery, graft and bluff.
Kolkhoz	Collectivised peasant villages. The few remaining peasants in the Soviet Union are taxed so heavily as to force them to join the collective farms.
Komsomol	Communist League of Youth.
Komsomolez	Member of the Komsomol.
Komsomolka	Female member of the Komsomol.
Kopeck	1/100 of rouble.
K.V.C.H.	Cultural-educational section.

# GLOSSARY

Magnitostroi	Building of great foundry in Urals.
Makhorka	Inferior kind of tobacco.
N.E.P.	New Economical Policy.
O.A.O.	General Administrative Section
P.E.O.	Planning-economical section.
Piatiletka	Five-year Plan.
Pravda	Meaning truth; name of official organ of Communist Party.
Promfinplan	Abbreviation for Industrial-Financial Plan.
Shpalerka	Familiar name for G.P.U. prison in Leningrad.
Siblag	Union of Siberian Camps.
Siel-Soviet	Village Soviet.
Sôkol	Pan-Slavic Sport Organisation.
Solovetsky Islands	A group of islands in the White Sea, on the largest of which was formerly a great monastery, now the particularly gruesome Camp of the G.P.U.
Sovkhoz	A landed estate under State management.
Svirstroi	Hydro-Electric Project on the River Svir.
Svoloch	Vulgar expression—son of a bitch.
Svir Camp	Camp on the River Svir, which connects Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega.
Torgsin	State owned Stores, where goods were only sold for foreign currency or in exchange for gold, silver or precious stones.
Turksib	Turkestan-Siberian Railway—built with great pretensions, now scarcely usable, and half sanded-up.
Udarnik	Workers distinguished by special performance.
U.R.Ch.	Accounting-Distributing Section.
Urks	Professional criminals.
U.R.Q.	Main Accounting-Distributing Department.
Vokhr	Armed guards.
W.B.C.	White Sea-Baltic Canal construction.
Yurchik	Pet name for Yura.

## NOTE

In a second volume Ivan Solonevich will relate how he, his son and his brother succeeded in escaping from the 'Russian Paradise.'

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